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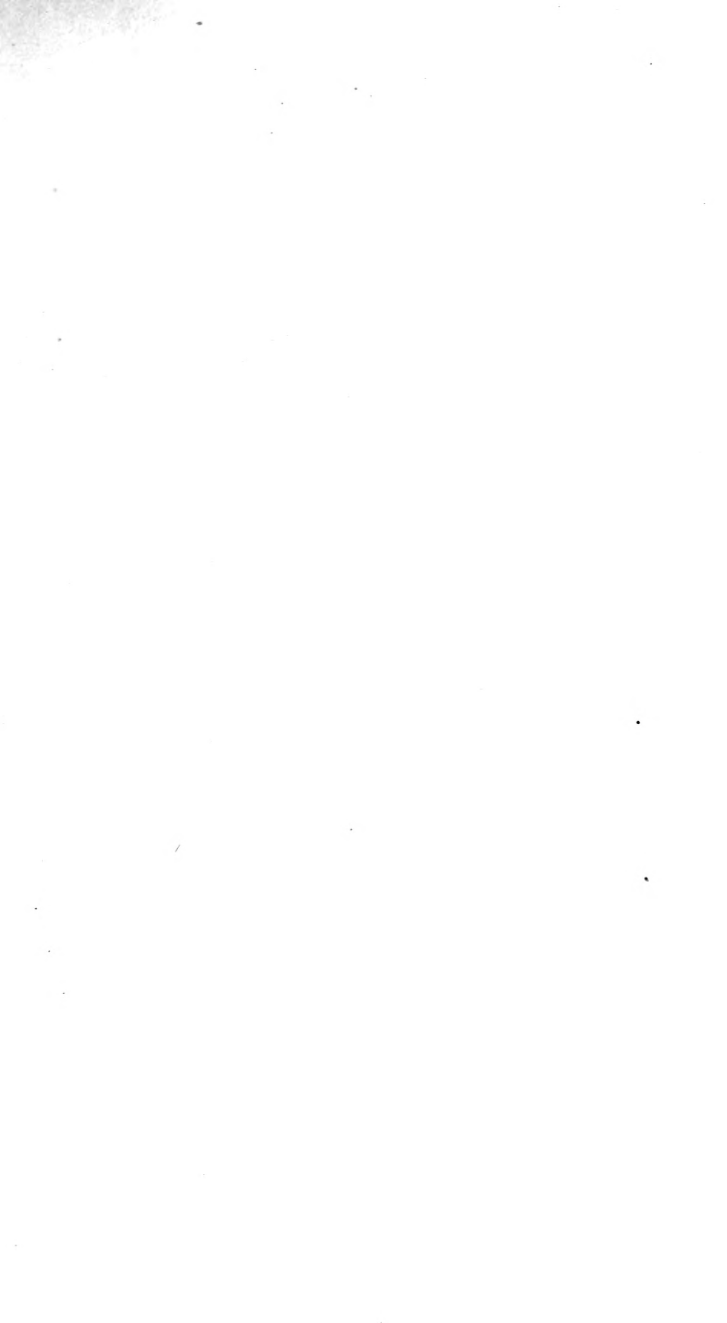
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# THE FATE:

A TALE OF STIRRING TIMES.

BY

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"THE OLD OAK CHEST," "HENRY SMEATON," ETC.

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# T H E F A T E .

## CHAPTER I.

It was wonderful to see how soon, with a little order and a right good will, all the rooms were cleared of the rich and delicate ornaments which filled them. The girl Alice, well-trained by her mistress, did good service in this way, and at length all was completed. Four servants, besides Gaunt Stilling, were selected to accompany the carriage ; and, after a few minutes' quiet conversation with Ralph, Hortensia retired to seek some repose. Her last

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words, as they parted were, "This is a strange life, Ralph."

How often such little truisms give the clue to long, deep, intricate, undisplayed trains of thought, which have been going on in silence and secrecy for a long time before the common-place result in which most meditations end, is expressed.

The words of Lady Danvers led the mind of Ralph on a journey fully as long and various as her own had previously been travelling ; and, after giving a few directions to his servant, he cast himself into a chair, and passed the night in sleepless silence till the faint gray of the early morning began to tinge the eastern sky. From time to time, he heard steps in the house throughout the night ; and, before the hour appointed, Hortensia was down and ready to proceed.

There are various characteristics which give the men who possess them great power and influence with their fellows : promptitude and decision, even

though they approach rashness ; firmness and determination, even when they touch upon obstinacy, are among these ; but great knowledge of the world, and, wide experience, are pre-eminent ; and by a combination of all, Gaunt Stilling had obtained an ascendancy amongst the servants of Lady Danvers, which rendered him at once the leader and commander, as it were, of the little party which surrounded the carriage as it wended on. He threw two men forward in advance at the distance of some five hundred yards from each other, to gain intelligence, and report to him in case of need. He himself rode a little before the carriage, and the other two men placed themselves one at each door or portiére, as it was the custom then to call them, one leading Ralph's horse by the bridle.

The morning was peculiarly fine, bright, glowing, and beautiful—the colours of the sun-rise unusually vivid ; but the feathery clouds overhead soon began to mass together. The sun lost his splendour ; became dull

and heavy-eyed, and then disappeared behind a shroud of vapours. First came on a thick, drizzling rain ; then a heavy, continuous pour, pitting the dry ground, and forming miniature torrents by the road-side.

The carriage was much more heavily laden than on the preceding journey ; and slowly and laboriously it went on, wallowing through the thick mud, and often seeming to pause as if to rest itself in the gutters which channelled the way. Progress was very tardy ; hour after hour went by, and still every scene was familiar to the eyes of Hortensia. She knew this house, and that farm, and the church upon the hill, and the little village inn with its jolly host ; and she could almost tell the exact distance from spot to spot. The slowness of their progress alarmed her ; and, after going on for four hours, and indulging in a fit of deep thought, she turned suddenly to Ralph, saying—

“ Indeed, I think you had better mount



your horse, and ride away with your man. I shall reach Wells in safety, without doubt; but I fear every moment we may meet with Colonel Kirke or some other of the King's officers, and the consequences might be dangerous to yourself. Have you not remarked that one of the men has ridden back several times to speak with your servant? We are now approaching the turning towards St. Mary's, and really we had better part here."

It cost her great effort to utter these words; but it cost Ralph none to reply.

"I will not leave you on any account," he said, "till I see you safely in your cousin's house at Wells. I should ill repay your kindness were I to act so selfish a part. A lady travelling in such scenes of confusion, needs all the protection she can have. The danger to myself I do not think great. If we are rightly informed, Kirke's men will be marching on a different road; and, as to the servants moving rapidly backwards and forwards, it is but to keep up the communication from front to rear.

We move slowly, indeed," he added ; " but I never expected to accomplish the journey in less than three days ; and with these roads it will probably take four."

" Four !" echoed Hortensia. " Why, I have ridden the distance in one. Heaven knows what may happen in four days !"

The words were still upon her lips, when Gaunt Stilling rode up to the carriage and looked in, saying, as if in an enquiring tone,

" I think we had better turn a little way up the lane to St. Mary's, sir ; for I find, from the reports, that a good large party of the King's troops is at a village about a mile before us. They halted there last night ; but where they are going this morning, the people do not seem to know. The carriage can get up for about half a mile, and the two first sharp turnings will hide it from this road. There is a field about that spot, where we can wheel about when we have obtained intelligence that the troops have marched on."

Ralph and Hortensia agreed to the proposal ; and directions were given to the coachman accordingly ; but Gaunt Stilling had reckoned without his host. Not fifty yards after the carriage had turned into the lane, a deep, unmended hollow, almost deserving the name of a pit, presented itself. The horses dashed over, one stumbling and nearly falling. The heavy and overladen vehicle plunged in with a shock, first to the fore and then to the hind wheels : the injured axle-tree, not well mended, gave way, and the carriage stuck fast and immoveable.

It was evident, in an instant, that the accident was beyond repair, at least for a long time ; and, while Ralph and Hortensia stood by the side of the vehicle in no slight embarrassment and dismay, a distant beat of drums was heard, and one of the horse-men, who had been sent on the high road to bring his fellow from the front, came up at a quick pace, saying,

"They tell me these are Kirke's lambs, my lady."

"You had better avoid that flock, madam," advised Gaunt Stilling. "We can all be seen from the road, and I would not have them find you here for a good deal."

"But what is to be done?" exclaimed Ralph, impatiently. "They are already marching, it would seem; the carriage cannot be repaired for hours, and Lady Danvers cannot go on on foot."

"No; but she can go on horseback," answered Gaunt Stilling.

"There is no lady's saddle," observed Ralph. "Her dress is not fitted for riding."

"Oh, that has been all taken care of," answered Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh, "if Mistress Alice followed my counsel, and the coachman Harrison did what I told him. I knew quite well we should have some accident before we had done, and that my

Lady would probably have to mount on horse-back and ride for it. As to the drum, that's only the muster-drum, and they won't march for this half hour. If the people have not forgotten, there's a pad for my Lady's riding on the carriage ; and an amazon-skirt, as they call it, under the cushion."

"The velvet pad is up behind," growled the coachman, who had been gazing disconsolately at his broken vehicle.

"I put the skirt in," cried the maid. "I always do what I'm told."

"But what am I to do with you, my poor Alice, if I ride away?" asked Lady Danvers.

"Oh, never mind me, my Lady," replied the maid. "I'm not a bit afraid of them. If they say a word to me, I'll scratch their eyes out. Or I could walk along down the lane, till I get to some cottage, and hide myself there till they have plundered the coach and gone by."

"Why, I should think you had known

them of old, Mistress Alice, you hit them off so pat," said Gaunt Stilling ; " but you won't find a cottage for a long way, I can tell you. However, if you and the men get into that little wood, and hide yourselves there, it is a thousand to one that they don't seek for you. The picking of the carriage will take them some time, and Kirke won't let them stop long."

" I shan't get into the woods," said the sturdy coachman. " I'll stand by the carriage."

" And I'll stick by the horses," said one of the men ; " the girl can hide herself in the wood if she likes — *I* won't."

" Then, my brave lads, I'll stay with you," rejoined Gaunt Stilling. " I know these men, and, perhaps, can do more with them than any of you. I know Master Kirke, too, and he knows me. However, do not let us waste time in talking." And, turning to Ralph, he added. " You and the lady and one of the men had better ride on, sir, as fast as may be. I will fol-

low you as soon as I can, and reach you where you stop for the night. Perhaps, we can get the carriage repaired, so as to go on to-morrow. Harrison, get the pad on the lightest going of the horses. Alice, set your little fingers to work about your lady's dress."

"Marry, you're familiar!" cried the maid, searching under the cushions of the carriage.

At the same time, Ralph remarked, "I do not know the way, Stilling."

"I do, I do," exclaimed Hortensia. "Only tell me, is it the second or third turning you take to the right?"

"The fourth, my Lady," replied Gaunt Stilling; "don't take the third, or it may lead you into the lion's jaws. The fourth turning; and then ride straight on. You go in one line for sixteen miles till you come to a cross road with a good inn. There, my lady, I think you'll need rest; and there, God willing, I'll bring you news. —Now, pretty mistress Alice, have you got the skirt?"

“Yes, here it is; but what my Lady is to do without her hat and feathers I cant tell.”

Hortensia smiled, but made no answer; and her extemporaneous toilet was soon completed.

The pad by this time had been placed upon one of the servant's horses, and Ralph lifted his beautiful companion into the saddle, not without some haste and anxiety; for the sound of fifes and drums playing a march was distinctly heard, and it was clear that Colonel Kirke and the Tangier regiment were moving down the road. As soon as she was safely seated, he sprang upon his own horse's back, and Hortensia shaking her rein lightly, with a look in which sadness checkered strangely one of her former gay smiles, put the beast into a canter, saying—

“Now, Ralph, for a gallop, such as I used to enjoy so much when I was a girl.”



## CHAPTER II.

THE roads were bad, and heavy with the rain ; but still Ralph and Hortensia kept up, for six or seven miles, the quick pace at which they had set out. They spoke little ; but the rapid motion seemed to animate and cheer them both. At length, Hortensia drew in her rein ; her colour was revived by the air and exercise, and a brighter look of hope beamed in her beautiful eye.

“ I think we must have distanced them, Ralph,” she said ; “ and we can ride on more quietly now.”

“ I trust there is no danger at present,”

answered Ralph ; “ and though, dear lady, you seem as if you were born companion of the huntress goddess, it may be better to spare the horses.”

“ One of Diana’s maidens, I suppose I was destined to be,” observed Hortensia ; and then, as if to take away the point from her words, she added, “ I was ever very fond of hunting, I remember, when I was a child, except, indeed, the catching of the beast, which I could never bear. The shrill scream of a poor hare, when caught by the dogs, banished me at length from the hunting-field for ever.”

She fell into thought again for a moment ; and then, lifting her eyes to her companion’s face, she said, “ We are very foolish, Ralph, I think : you—I—everybody.”

“ Indeed !” returned Ralph, smiling ; “ why think you so ?”

“ Because,” replied Hortensia, “ not content with all the great and ugly evils with which Fate has crammed this mortal abode of ours, we set up looking-glasses all round

them in our minds, to multiply them by reflection. Is not this foolish, Ralph ?”

“Methinks it is,” answered her companion ; “but I suppose the reason of it is, that we wish to behold them on every side, to see if we cannot diminish them or cast them out.”

“Vain effort!” exclaimed Hortensia. “Our path is straight on ; we cannot turn aside ; the ills that lie upon it must be encountered in front, and there is no use in watching for them till they are within reach. Let us be wise, Ralph, if it be but for this day. Let us enjoy the present as far as we can. Think no more of a dark past, or a gloomy future, and I will cast from my mind many a heavy thought and anxious care which the world’s eye shall never see. Look ! the sun is breaking out from behind the clouds, mottling the livery of the sky with gold. Let us fancy that, in a calm, peaceful land, in a softened summer day, with nothing but prosperity round us, a happy home before us in which to rest, a short, but bright, vista of pleasant, youthful lovers behind us,

and light and loveliness on every side—let us fancy, I say, that we are taking a morning's ride for mere enjoyment. Can you do *your* part?"

"I will try," replied Ralph; "and indeed, dear lady, as you say, it is the wisest plan. I have turned over all the events of these last few days in my mind, during this whole morning, and during the greater part of last night too; but thought has come to no result; and, as you see, even the best-devised plans are frustrated in the moment of execution. I really feel inclined to be a fatalist, and believe that destiny is leading me on blindfold, struggle how I may."

"Perhaps so," said Hortensia; "but you are already breaking our compact, and moralizing upon things that be. Let us get into dream-land, Ralph. It is the mind's best refuge. You never were in France, or Italy, or Greece, I think; never saw the seven sober United Provinces, nor dwelt amongst the stiff and boorish aristocracy of Germany?"

“Never,” replied Ralph, “never.”

The very names, however, of these places turned his thoughts; as Hortensia intended, into another channel, and the two continued, not without an effort indeed, to discuss subjects the least possibly connected with their own fate or the circumstances of the moment. Often, very often, would thought recur to painful themes. The distant barking of a dog—the wild, joyous galloping of a horse in a neighbouring field—would startle and alarm with the thought of fresh danger; but then, each time this occurred, the effort to banish the nightmare of the moment would be less difficult, till at length they nearly succeeded in forgetting all that they wished to forget.

Thus, the time passed more pleasantly, and the road seemed shorter and less wearisome, than it might have done, had they yielded greater attention to pains and anxieties.

That which Hortensia counselled and was practising, has been, through the history of the world, one of the great

secrets of philosophy and fortitude. The stoic bore his pain—the martyr his anguish—by thinking of something else ; and great would be the blessing to man, if he could attain to such mastery over his own mind, as to give no more thought to any painful circumstance than is absolutely necessary to safety.

Ralph's heart was well guarded, indeed, or it could not have gone through that journey with Hortensia in safety ; not so much from the beauty of her person, or the charm of her conversation, or the sweetness of her voice, or the high-hearted mind which seemed to pour a sort of halo of light around her, as from the deep thoughts of her character, her fate, which that long, dreamy ride suggested. He was thinking of her continually, even while he was conversing with her on indifferent things—thinking of her, not in a manner that ought to have pained Margaret if she had seen all his thoughts ; but thinking of her more than Margaret would perhaps

have altogether liked. The words which gave his mind that direction were those which Hortensia had used in speaking of herself, where she promised, for the enjoyment of the moment, to cast away from her mind many a heavy thought and deep anxiety which the world will never see ; and on this text he went on discoursing with himself, as I have said, even while he was striving to keep up a gay, wandering conversation with her.

The way seemed short ; and neither Ralph nor Hortensia could believe that they had gone sixteen miles from the turning of the road, when they saw at length a large, good-looking inn standing at a corner where two paths crossed. That which they were travelling themselves was a mere lane. The other which traversed it, was evidently a high road ; and Ralph said,

“ I hope we are right. We surely cannot have gone so many miles already ? ”

Hortensia looked up at him with a gay smile, and, pointing to his horse, replied,

“The poor uncommunicative beasts know better, Ralph. See how your horse hangs his head! and both steeds seem to think they will be much the better for corn and water. Hark you, Peter,” she continued, turning to the servant who had followed them. “Ride up to yon inn-door, and ask how far this is from St. Mary’s. That will give us some indication of the distance we have come. But mind—mention not my name, or Mr. Woodhall’s, on any account. It might be very dangerous to me, Peter; and I think you love your mistress well enough not to risk her safety by any indiscretion.”

“I won’t say a word, my lady,” replied the good man, pulling off his hat as he rode forward.

In two or three minutes more, Ralph and Hortensia were seated quietly in a comfortable small room of an old-fashioned inn, with an old-fashioned landlord waiting upon them. He was full of attention, and often took his snowy white night-cap in his hand.



uncovering his bald head to guests whom he saw were worthy of reverence.

“Dinner shall be placed before you, my lord and my lady, in a moment,” he said. “You have just come at the nick of time ; for we had a great banquet ordered for Master Jenkins and his friends. He was to be married the day after to-morrow to pretty Mistress Betty Parker of the Grange ; but those soldiers, who came down to join Oglethorpe’s regiment last night, carried him off with them for disaffection—foul fall them ! His only fault, if it was a fault, was too much affection—for Mistress Betty Parker. He would have given her his whole soul and substance ; and, as to his being a non-conformist, he was as good a churchman as any in these parts ; was baptized by old Doctor Hicks, and confirmed by the Bishop of Wells. But I’ll shew you your bed-room, my lord and my lady. It is all quite snug and comfortable, in here out of this parlour.” And he

threw open a door leading into a very nice room beyond.

“ You make a mistake, my good friend,” said Ralph, while Hortensia’s face glowed with painful crimson. “ I am not this lady’s husband, but merely protecting her on her journey in these dangerous times.”

“ Well, sir, I hope you soon may be,” said the pertinacious host. “ You couldn’t have a better wife, nor she a better husband, for that matter, I’m sure. Good gracious! the lady’s crying! Dear me, madam, I’m very sorry—I beg pardon a thousand times. I’m a foolish old man, and must chatter.”

“ Never mind, never mind, my good man,” returned Hortensia, drying her eyes. “ It is I who am foolish ; but I have been subject to much fatigue and anxiety to-day. We had very nearly fallen in with a band of these lawless soldiers who are about ; and I was obliged to leave my carriage on the road, broken down, and ride on under this kind friend’s protection.”

“ Oh, well, if that is all, he can have the bed-room just opposite, where he can come to you in a moment if you want him,” said the host ; and again Hortensia’s face glowed like a rose.

“ If I stay the night, I may need that for my maid,” she remarked. “ The girl will come on as soon as possible. I dare say you can find this gentleman a room somewhere else.”

“ I have none so good,” said the landlord. “ Twenty-five is rather damp ; and number seven—”

“ Never mind, never mind,” said Ralph, “ any one will do for me. These must be for the Lady Hortensia and her maid. Now, go and hurry dinner as fast as possible.”

The old man turned towards the door, but stopped suddenly and looked round with a bright expression, as if a good thought struck him.

“ Won’t it be better,” he said, “ to have

a bed put into my lady's room for the maid?"

"Exactly, exactly!" said Ralph; "that will do well."

"Capital, capital!" cried the old landlord, snapping his fingers with an air of triumph. "That hits it precisely; then you can have the opposite room, and comfort them both, if they should need it."

Ralph could hear no more, and burst into a fit of laughter, in which, to say the truth, Hortensia joined, although she was not very sure whether she should laugh or weep again.

The old man looked in some surprise, and left the room with a rather sheepish air.

As soon as he was gone, Hortensia raised her eyes to Ralph's face, with an expression of much anxiety, rendered almost whimsical by the faint glow of merriment that still lingered like sunset round her lips.

"This will not do, Ralph," she said, in a timid tone. "I hope my people will come

and join us soon ; but I must not—I fear I must not—travel with you alone ; though God knows, and you know, that our feelings towards each other would not shrink from the scrutiny of all the world.”

Ralph took her hand, and pressed his lips upon it.

“ You have been pained too much on my account already,” he said ; “ but I must, and will, see you safe to your journey’s end, Hortensia. If your maid does not join you at once, I doubt not we can engage some honest girl here to fill her place for the time, and accompany you on the way to-morrow. No one who knows you could doubt you for an instant.”

“ But what may not Margaret think ?” asked Lady Danvers, turning very pale.

“ Margaret’s thoughts are all generous,” replied Ralph ; “ and if she knew you as I do, she would almost worship you for your kindness to me.”

“ Without a doubt or suspicion ?” asked Hortensia, sadly.

“Without a shadow or a cloud to dim her confidence,” replied Ralph, boldly. “Others might insinuate what Margaret would not believe ; but I feel it now, dear Lady Danvers, to be a duty to you, to her, and to myself, as soon as I can find an opportunity, to write to my dear cousin, and tell her all the generous, noble, disinterested kindness you have shewn to me. It is risking a good deal, perhaps ; but I think I can find the means of conveying the letter to her secretly.”

“Perhaps I may summon courage to write to her also,” said Hortensia, thoughtfully. “A woman in a woman’s letter soon reads a woman’s heart ; and mine I do not wish to conceal—from *her* eyes at least. She will understand me.”

Ralph pressed her hand kindly in his own. His brow was clear and calm—his eye expressed esteem, regard—affection, but not passion ; and he answered,

“*She* will understand you, as *I* under-

stand you. She will be grateful to you, as I am grateful to you ; and she will neither doubt, nor fear, nor hesitate ; but comprehend you, most excellent and amiable of human beings, as you will ever be comprehended and loved by one who esteems you more than any other creature upon earth, except her with whom his whole fate and existence has been linked from early childhood."

Heaven knows what it was in his words ; but Hortensia bowed her head till it touched her hands upon the table, and burst into so vehement a fit of sobbing, that Ralph, after in vain endeavouring to soothe her, or even attract her attention to himself, called loudly from the door for help, and soon brought the landlord's wife and daughter to the assistance of his fair companion.

The peculiar situation in which they were placed, prevented him from carrying her himself to her bed-room, but he soon after had the happiness of hearing that she

was calmer and better ; and for an hour or two he waited tranquilly, in the pleasant and quiet abode which they had found, for some news of all they had left behind them on the road.

Hortensia had just re-joined him—had just made one of those excuses which women often make for any agitation they betray when emotion overpowers habitual self-command ; saying that, in truth, she had over calculated her strength, and that the fatigues which she had lately undergone, had affected her more than she had expected.

“The truth is, I suppose, Ralph,” she said, “I have been acting the fine court-lady too much of late ; and in cities and crowds have lost somewhat of the dairy-maid health I used to boast of in days of yore. I must abandon such enfeebling scenes, and once more ride my fifteen or twenty miles in the day, as I used to do ; for I am resolved not to be a languishing



dame till my hair begins to turn gray, and not even then if I can help it."

They were gazing forth from the window, which, looking across a low copse on the opposite side of the road, gave a beautiful view over that rich and beautiful country which extends for many miles along the borders of Somerset and Devonshire—a land which probably my eyes will never see again, but which will be present to my mind to the last hour of life. The garden of England, well may they call it; and when they say that, surely they mean the garden of the world. The sun was shining fitfully; the clouds, broken, were drifting away on a swift wind; all the trees and fields were sparkling with the past rain; and the soft exhalation of the warm earth, marked out the ærial perspective of every far-receding slope more tenderly than usual. From the refreshed ground, it rose up loaded with perfume; and the note of the black-bird poured richly and musically

from the covert, as if to keep scent, and sight, and sound, in harmony.

They had not gazed above two minutes, however, and Hortensia had hardly had time to ask her own heart how and why it was, that Nature's own world was so bright, and beautiful, and peaceful, while man's was so full of ruggedness and thorns, when the sight of Gaunt Stilling, trotting up quickly to the door, and quite alone, called the attention both of herself and her companion.

The man asked some questions quickly of an ostler who was standing by the horse-trough, gave him some large saddle-bags to carry into the house, and then, dismounting, entered the inn. A moment after, he was in the presence of his master and Lady Danvers ; and Ralph argued at once, from the expression of his face, that matters had gone wrong with him. Nevertheless, his words did not convey any evil tidings.

"Lucky you didn't stop, my Lady," he

said, addressing Hortensia ; “for we were very likely to have had a fight for it, and two shots were fired, which did no damage to anything but the carriage. However, we have saved it from actual plunder, though I believe Kirke’s lambs have filched two or three things of no very great importance.’”

“But where is the carriage ?” asked Ralph. “and where is Lady Danvers’s maid ?”

“It will be impossible to get the carriage repaired till to-morrow,” replied Gaunt Stilling ; “and it may be night before it is ready ; but we contrived at last to get it drawn up into the yard of a good farmer, who will take care of it, and the men and all, and Mistress Alice to boot, till they can set off to Wells. As to the young woman, my Lady,” he added, with a laugh, “you should have her taught to ride, for we could find no possible way of getting her on here, or I would have brought her with me. We contrived a capital sort of pad-saddle for her, and mounted her

tolerably well ; but no sooner was she on one side, than she was off the other. So, the matter was in vain ; for I knew my horse would have enough to do to bring me here alone. Otherwise I would have seated her on a pillion behind me. I have brought a heap of things for your Ladyship, however, which the girl crammed into a big pair of bags I bought of the farmer."

"Have you heard any news of the other forces that are marching?" asked Ralph. "It is absolutely needful that we should get some accurate intelligence."

"Hard to be found, sir," replied Gaunt Stilling. "I don't think that there are three men amongst the King's troops who know which way they are marching, or what they are doing; and Feversham is not one of the three. If Monmouth had but one good regiment of foot, and a handful of horse, he would beat them all in detail. He must win a battle, or he's lost, however,

for they're pressing him back upon the sea, merely by their dead weight."

"But can he win a battle with such ill-disciplined and ill-armed forces as he has?" enquired Ralph.

"I don't rightly know, sir," answered Stilling. "His men are bad enough in all conscience; but the King's are not much better; and Feversham is an idle, effeminate fop—vain, too, as a peacock. The men are a set of drunken marauders, only fit to scour a conquered country; and the officers, for the most part, a set of dissolute, enfeebled libertines, who know as much of tactics or campaigning as that table: your cousin, Lord Coldenham, is one of them, sir. I think it would not take a very strong man to knock down a whole regiment of such, like a child's house of cards.—But there is Churchill," he added, "and Oglethorpe, and Dumbarton's regiment, and the Blues. Monmouth will fall down there, if they come across him. His only chance

would be to beat Feversham first, and then push on to London. A battle won, and a forward march, would make many cold friends warm ones."

"But have you then been able to obtain no intelligence which may guide us?" asked his master. "I care not for myself, Stilling, if I could see Lady Danvers safely at Wells."

"Ay, that is the thing, sir," answered Stilling; "for the whole country is in a state of commotion, and it is almost equally dangerous to move or to sit still. The whole roads to the south and east are in a state you could form no idea of. Every sort of outrage is being committed. Nothing is safe. Nobody is respected. The landlords are ruined by having men quartered upon them. The villages are plundered, the farmer's horses all taken to draw the baggage-waggons and artillery; and you would suppose, not only that martial law was proclaimed, but that the whole

land was given up to pillage. It is as bad as Tangier ; and it was only because Kirke knew me, and I knew Kirke, that her Ladyship's carriage was spared. When I told him that, if he did not keep up some discipline about the carriage at least, secrets might come out he would not like to have public, I could see him fingering his pistol, as if he did not well know whether to shoot me or bid his men march on ; but I had a pistol too, and my hand upon it, and I think that settled the question with him. However, all I can say is, we must go on very carefully to-morrow, for nobody seems to know which way Monmouth has turned. I dare say we shall hear, however, as we proceed ; and as to the rest, we must trust to the chapter of accidents. Now, with your good leave, sir, I will go and get something to eat ; for I have had neither bit nor sup since last night, and my horse is nearly as badly off as his master."

Gaunt Stilling withdrew, and Ralph and

Hortensia were left alone to consult over the somewhat cheerless prospects before them. To stay where they were for that night, seemed inevitable ; and, following Ralph's suggestion, Lady Danvers sent for the good woman of the house, to enquire if some young woman could not be procured in the neighbourhood, to act in the capacity of her maid, for a few days. The landlady willingly agreed that her own daughter should sleep in Hortensia's room, and attend upon her that night ; but no consideration would induce her to allow the girl to quit her home on the following day.

Enquiries were then made in the village which lay about a quarter of a mile down the road ; but all proved in vain. The terror which the various bodies of troops had occasioned, rendered all parents anxious to keep their children at home ; and Hortensia was obliged to make up her mind to undergo any evil construction that the world might put upon her conduct, as



she was placed in a position from which, however unpleasant, there was no escape.

It would be tedious to trace the adventures of the next two or three days ; for they consisted only of embarrassments and disappointments very similar to those which have been already noticed. Whichever way Ralph and Hortensia directed their steps, intelligence reached them that some body of troops lay between them and the place they sought to reach ; and, turned at every point, several days were lost in fruitless wanderings, which only brought them nearer to the Bristol Channel, and farther both from Wells and Hortensia's own dwelling.

Sometimes, a feeling of despair would come over Ralph ; and he more than once thought of seeking out the quarters of his cousin Lord Coldenham, of whose presence with the royal forces he was now assured, and trusting to his honour to find means of

conveying Lady Danvers safely on her way. But when he proposed such a plan to her, she rejected it at once in a manner which admitted of no farther argument.

## CHAPTER III.

IN a room, which has been before described, in Coldenham Castle, sat that same stately, proud-looking, majestic dame, to whom Ralph Woodhall had paid a brief visit of ceremony before his final departure from his father's house. The unconcealed gray hair upon the broad, powerful, masculine brow, added not less, perhaps, to the grave dignity of her aspect, than the keen, finely cut features, and the stern, black eye. A look of some discontent was upon her countenance as she opened, one after another, a number of letters which had been

placed upon the table before her ; but no doubt, no hesitation, no remorse ; and yet she might very well have felt all, or either.

“Not caught him yet?” she said, bitterly. “God’s my life ! thief-takers must have lost their skill. But they must have him soon. I have tracked him to his lair, and it seems they have unearthed him. Surely they can run him down now. It must be this foolish confusion in the country about Monmouth which has favoured his evasion.—Methinks I will go over myself. Men are but women now-a-days ; and it is time that women should act the part of men. I will soon find means to catch him. I fear me, Coldenham is too weak and soft, and the old lord too rash and hasty, and Robert—though the best head amongst them—too politic and wily. It needs to see clearly, and judge wisely, and strike boldly. A keen sword is of no great use without a strong hand. I will soon do it, if I go ; and let me but

catch him, I will so pile up crimes upon his head, that he will need a wiser jury than England can afford to set him free."

This was partly murmured in distinct words, partly thought ; and while her meditation on that subject continued, she retained in her hand, unopened, the next letter of the pile, hardly regarding it. When she had done, she looked for a moment at the back, and said—

"The old man's hand ! Why does he write to me, I wonder ?"

And, tearing open the seal, she read the contents. They seemed to affect her more than she expected ; for one of those strange changes, which I have before described, came over her countenance.

"Ha !" she exclaimed, "ha ! how sits the wind now ?"

Then, turning to the beginning, she re-read the letter to the end. It was to the following effect, and much more brief than good Mr. Woodhall's epistles usually were.

“MY DEAR LADY AND COUSIN,

“I write to you because I am informed, on authority which, to me, would be beyond doubt, as proof of any other assertion, that, although no one should be better aware than yourself of the innocence of my son Ralph in the matter of his cousin Henry Woodhall's death, you are urging on our kinsman, Lord Woodhall, to persecute him with great severity, and also are engaged in seeking causes of offence which may render him obnoxious to the court, and, perhaps, even prejudice him before a jury. This information having been communicated to me without any injunction to secrecy, I think it but just to yourself and my son—although, I believe, some error must exist—to make known to you the fact, in order that you may at once give immediate contradiction to the report, should it be false. Should it be out of your power to contradict it, however, which

I do not believe, I have to warn you that the consequences to yourself may be more dangerous than you imagine. All your proceedings in this case will at once be brought to light, and many things, now apparently buried for ever in the darkness of the past, may have to be brought forward in the eye of day.

“Trusting that, with the firmness and decision which belong to your character, you will at once deny the truth of the information which has reached me,

“I beg to subscribe myself, et cetera.”

Lady Coldenham gazed upon the paper with a look in which many an evil expression mingled with surprise.

“Insolent old fool!” was her first exclamation. “Does he dare—who could have told him of this? His fellow-simpleton, Lord Woodhall himself, I suppose. Nay, nay, there can be no communication between *them*. It must have come from

some other source. Whence, I cannot divine. The old man, Stilling, surely could not—nay, how could he? He knows not of it. It is very strange. And this threat, too. The son threatened, and he shall rue it. The father threatens, and he may rue it too. Deny the truth! Nay, I will assert it with the firmness and determination which belong to me. It is time that I should know to what these menaces tend. If I am to have a foe, let me meet him in front.”

Taking up a pen, she wrote hastily upon a sheet of paper a few bold lines to the following effect :—

“ SIR,

“ What I dare to do, I dare to avow. Your son Ralph murdered his cousin, Henry Woodhall. I have urged, and shall urge, Lord Woodhall, the bereaved father, to suffer no weak remains of affection for an unworthy object to pre-



vent him from punishing the offender to the utmost. I, for one, should prefer to have a man hanged out of my family, than to have a murderer left living in it.

“Your Cousin,

“ESTHER COLDENHAM.”

This being done, and the letter sealed, she rang the silver bell upon her table ; and, as soon as a servant appeared, handed him the tender epistle, saying—

“Despatch that by a messenger immediately.”

“May it please your Ladyship,” replied the man, “Mr. Woodhall’s messenger is waiting.”

“Then let him have it, and begone,” replied Lady Coldenham ; “his master cannot have my answer too soon.”

When she was alone, Lady Coldenham again read her cousin’s letter, and it

seemed less satisfactory to her even than at first ; for, with all the evil passions which it evidently stirred up, and which painted themselves upon her countenance, there was an expression of doubt, of hesitation, of dread, which that face had seldom, if ever, before borne.

She had great power over herself, however ; she was resolute, persevering, undaunted in purpose. Little had she scrupled to do in life ; and no fear had ever got sufficient hold upon her to deter her from any act on which she had determined.

Whatever it was she dreaded on the present occasion, she suffered not the impression to remain upon her mind for more than a few moments. Then casting it from her, as something that was used and done with, she turned to the letters again, perused all those which she had not read before, made notes upon such as referred to business, and then calmly and deliberately

ordered everything to be prepared for a journey into Dorsetshire within three hours.

Her own arrangements were very rapidly made ; and the early time of dinner was approaching, when the peculiar servant who attended upon that room, entered with another letter in his hand. Lady Coldenham took it, and looked at the address. The moment she did so, a paleness came over her face ; and the man could see that her hand shook as she broke the seal. He did not, therefore, remain, but retired with his usual noiseless step.

The door, however, was not yet quite closed, when he heard a cry as of pain ; and then the sound of a heavy fall. Running hastily back, he found his mistress stretched senseless on the floor. The letter lay wide open, at a little distance from her, and he thought fit to look at it before he called for aid. Only one word, written in a fine, bold hand, in the middle of the

page, was to be seen. It was, "Beware!" As he could make nothing of it, he called the waiting-woman and the housekeeper, and a number of other servants, who soon, by their united efforts, brought Lady Col-denham to herself. For a moment or two after her eyes opened, she lay quite still where they had placed her; but then, as if moved by some sudden passion, she started up, snatched the letter from the floor, and uttered some wild and whirling words which no one could rightly comprehend.

"It is false!" she cried. "It is a forgery! They are in a league to frighten me. But they shall find themselves mistaken—ay, they shall find themselves mistaken."

After tearing the letter into a thousand pieces, she sank slowly into a chair, and leaned her head upon her hand.

"Is the coach come?" she asked, as if not fully aware how short a space of time had elapsed since she gave her orders.

"No, my lady," replied the waiting-

woman. "It is not time yet. But as your ladyship has not been well, would it not be better to delay your journey till to-morrow?"

"Not an hour—not a minute!" ejaculated Lady Coldenham, sternly. Then, rising up from her chair as loftily as ever, she added, "You may withdraw. Let me know when dinner is ready."

## CHAPTER IV.

THE sun set slowly and somewhat dimly too, over an extensive, melancholy-looking plain in the west of England. Two persons gazed across the wide expanse, from the windows of a tolerably comfortable farm-house, situated on the first slope of a rising ground to the eastward. Nothing could appear more dreary and hopeless than the aspect of the scene before their eyes. The general face of the country, for some miles to the westward, was completely flat ; rather hollowed out than otherwise, looking much like a Dutch landscape, where a

broad tract of country, rescued from the sea, continually forces upon the mind of the spectator the impression that, at any time, the sea may break in again and recover its own. I know few things more desolate than one of these Dutch landscapes late in the autumn or early in the spring. A sort of marshy, fenny feel is in the very look, which makes the mind shiver and creep, as if it had got the ague before the body was sensible of disease.

But even a Dutch landscape had the advantage over that which lay beneath the eyes of the travellers. Those manifold windmills, with their arms waving in the breeze, which give a sort of merry activity to most of the Dutch prospects, were wanting. The curious old manorial houses, very often furnished with draw-bridge and portcullis, and with clumps of old trees around them, were not to be seen. Here and there, indeed, marked out by the falling of the light and shade, a little elevated piece of ground, apparently but a few yards wide, though

in reality much more extensive, rose up as a sort of island a few feet above the dull level of the plain ; and, in those spots, almost invariably appeared the spire of a little village-church, with a low cottage or two, scattered amongst the orchards, and the squire's or parson's house domineering over the rest.

All these houses, however—in which men and women dwelt—in which every human passion had its sway—in which love, and hate, and hope, and ambition, and envy, and pride, and jealousy, and enmity, and strife, and mortal struggle, existed as well as in the midst of courts—seemed, to the eyes that looked upon them from the height, no larger than the smallest of a child's playthings, so completely did they sink into insignificance, lost as it were in the vast expanse around.

Dim was the aspect of the whole scene. The setting sun—half veiled in cloud, yet partly seen through the gray covering of the sky—looked pale and wan, and of evil



augury. No rosy glow marked his descent, till his lower limb touched the very verge of the horizon ; and then, two or three blood-red streaks announced the death of day, without affording one hope of brighter looks to-morrow. There were none of those strong contrasts, those deep blue shadows and warm yellow lights, brought forth by the changeful aspect of the April or October day ; but the utmost variation in the depth of hue, served but to throw out in very slight relief the little hamlet-covered elevations I have mentioned. Perhaps, indeed, this effect was produced more from the long lines of light mist that rose up from the lower parts of the ground, than from any contrast of light and shade ; and the dull, leaden, cheerless, rayless look of the whole, was only rendered more oppressive by two or three tall wreaths of light blue smoke, which rose up here and there several miles apart, marking out the distances, and showing how wide was the space beneath the eye.

“Somewhere here,” said Ralph, “must have lain, I think, the famous isle of Athelney, so celebrated in our Saxon history ; for this was the great marsh—at that time nearly covered with water in the winter—into which the Danes could never penetrate.”

“It looks, indeed, a sad and gloomy place—the refuge of despair,” replied Hortensia. Then allowing her eyes to run forward over some twelve or fourteen miles of ground, they rested upon a spot where, against the western sky, rose up a number of irregular white masses, crowned by a very tall steeple, which looked as solitary and melancholy as a column in a wilderness. “That must be Bridgewater, I suppose,” she added.

“I fancy so,” answered Ralph ; “but I cannot tell. We will ask the good farmer.”

Ralph was turning towards the door, when Hortensia stayed him, saying—

“Nay, do not leave me, Ralph ; I am very sad to-night. I know not why it is ; but I suppose these long journeys, and this wearing anxiety, have fatigued me much —fatigued mind, and heart, and soul, and spirit, more than the body ; for these frail limbs do not feel so weary as after the first day’s journey ; but there is nothing like the weariness of the spirit. It matters little whether it is Bridgewater or not. Let it be what it may, we shall learn more to-morrow.”

The moment after, with a little spice of that caprice which the weariness of the spirit that she talked of, often gives, Hortensia added,

“Should that be Bridgewater, and the villages we see there be occupied by the King’s troops, as the people said, they must have somehow passed us, and I should think that we could get across the country to Bristol or Bath early to-morrow. Of course, if Monmouth is before them, they

will call in all stragglers and detachments, and the road in their rear must be open."

"I have good hope it will prove so," replied Ralph; "but if the intelligence we have heard to-night be correct, your own house at Danvers Newchurch must be free of these marauders. Nothing is more probable than that Lord Feversham should order Kirke, as the people told us, to join him again by forced marches."

"I wish Stilling would return," said Lady Danvers, with a sigh. "We have fed so long upon the bitter bread of uncertainty, that I am marvellously tired of the diet, Ralph."

"The man has not yet been gone half an hour," replied Ralph Woodhall. "Take my counsel, dear lady. Go and lie down to rest for a few hours; and as soon as Stilling returns, I will send and let you know what news he brings. If I judge rightly, some one will be up in the house all night; for the good people are evidently

anxious and alarmed, in consequence of the near presence of the soldiery."

"If I sleep at all," said Hortensia, "it shall be in this large chair, though the back be as tall and stiff as a monument: there, ready for any event, I shall rest more quietly than in a bed. I like this sober evening twilight—this sort of middle state of light, where nothing is very brilliant, and nothing very dark, like the calm, even hue of happy mediocrity. Forbid me candles, at an hour such as this! I could go on, methinks, musing and pondering in this light for ever, if it would but last—or till the night of age and death fell upon me."

Her quiet, melancholy dream ended with the opening of the door; and the good farmer's wife entered, saying, in a broad Somersetshire dialect, "Come, young folks, don't 'ee sit moping here in the dark. I've got something ready all hot, for your supper, down below. A plenty of roasted eggs, and some bacon, and some good dough-

cakes as ever was baked. It's poor feeding for such as you be, I dare say ; but it's the best we can give, and it's given right hearty."

" And so will we partake of it," said Hortensia, rising, and laying her hand upon the good woman's arm. " Come, Ralph, let us go to supper. We can employ our time worse, in sitting thinking sadly here."

" Well, thou art a dear, beautiful lady ; and there's the very best cider in the country, to boot," said the farmer's wife, walking down the stairs by the side of her fair guest.

Hortensia did not see the connection between herself and the cider ; but she asked no questions, and was soon seated at the farmer's supper table, where, in addition to himself, his wife, and her two guests, were half a score of ploughmen and maid-servants—all very decorous in their behaviour, though simple and rough enough in their manners.

The conversation naturally turned to the situation of Monmouth and the King's troops ; and some speculations were indulged in, as to the result of the struggle going on. It was evident that the good farmer was a Tory at heart, although he took especial care to guard the expression of his opinions.

“ Lord bless you, my Lady,” he said, in answer to some observation of Hortensia, “ there will be no battle. The Duke can't afford to fight such men as he's got afore him—that's to say, the Duke, or King Monmouth, as they call him ; and I can't tell, of course, which is right. But he's a strengthening of himself in Bridgewater, they say ; and I know he sent for a good number of our lads round about, to help to throw up dykes. He'll soon be obligated to give 'em all up, I've a notion—but nobody can't tell after all. War and love are the two most uncertain things that be ; and I don't know which is the worst, for my part.”

“ Love,” said Hortensia, smiling ; “ for, besides being bad in itself, as you say, it often leads to war, which is another evil.”

“ Lord bless ’ee, my Lady, love’s a very good thing in its way, when it’s young and fresh,” said the farmer’s wife, with a merry laugh. “ It ain’t like beer, the better for keeping, that’s true ; but all those sweet liquors get sour when they get stale ; and so love’s no worse than the rest of ’em—baint it so, father ?”

The jolly farmer shook his sides with a hearty laugh, but replied, with a better compliment than courts could afford,

“ Such as thou never gets stale, my dear old girl ; for there’s a sweet spirit in the heart o’ thee, that won’t let a drop in thy veins grow sour ; and the longer thou’rt kept, the better.”

The conversation served somewhat to cheer the visitors ; but still both Ralph and Hortensia were anxious for the return of Gaunt Stilling, and Lady Danvers would not consent to retire to rest before inform-



ation was received of what was the course to be pursued in the morning.

After supper was over, they went up again together to the room above, and seated themselves by the window, while the good farmer's wife followed them with a single lamp, and sat making stockings ; every now and then saying a word or two, calculated, as she thought, to keep their spirits up.

Ralph and Hortensia spoke little, but gazed out on the scene before them, with the stars twinkling faintly above, and the vast expanse of Sedgemoor, nearly veiled in mist, looking like a dim, uncertain sea.

“ Ay, we none of us can't rest to-night,” said the old woman. Then, after a pause and two or three more stitches, she continued, “ That's because we all feel as if something was a'going to happen—and something must happen too, very soon ; I'm sure of that. They've got too near, to part without tearing one another.”

“It is sad to think of,” said Hortensia ; “perhaps to-morrow may bring fate to many hundreds of honest men who ought to be friends and brethren.”

“Likely, my lady,” replied the farmer’s wife. And there the conversation dropped for a time.

“Farmer Bacon thinks they be a’going to have a siege,” said the good dame, after about half an hour’s silence ; “but I don’t think they’ll wait for that slow work.”

“I imagine Lord Feversham would hardly give the Duke time to fortify himself,” Ralph remarked. And there the conversation dropped again.

About an hour after, Ralph said, “Hark ! Do you not hear the sound of a horse’s hoofs beating upon a hard road or a causeway ? I dare say it is Stilling coming back.”

“It must be on Zoyland Causeway,” said the old woman ; “for all the roads hereabouts be mere peas-pudding. You would not hear the galloping of a whole regiment of horses.

That horse is six miles off, at the least ; but the night is still, you see."

A short time then elapsed without any further observation ; but suddenly Hortensia started, and uttered a low exclamation. A bright flash of fire was seen to blaze through the fog towards the centre of the moor ; and, after some seconds, a loud, ringing report of musketry was heard. Then, immediately after, flash after flash ran along a straight line across the moor, extending some three or four hundred yards ; and the peal of the shot was mingled with other sounds, probably shouts of command, or the cheer of troops in the charge.

It was clear that a battle was going on—that a night-attack had been made by Monmouth, on the King's troops, and that mighty destinies hung upon the events which were taking place on one spot in the midst of that wild moor.

In five or ten minutes more, a light broke forth about two miles to the right, steady

and persistent, as if a bonfire had been lighted there ; but a number of flashes also poured down from that quarter ; and then came the sound of many horses' feet, beating the hard causeway.

The farmer, and several people of the house, ~~came~~ came up, induced, by the sounds which reached the house, to look out upon the distant battle. All were silent, all were pale, with the strong emotions of the moment ; and it is not at all improbable that, from amongst the farming men at least, many an aspiration went up for the success of Monmouth.

Again at the end of a quarter of an hour, firing commenced upon the left ; but it was faint and scattered, and still the heat of the strife was evidently towards the centre of Feversham's position. There the firing was kept up incessantly, rising and falling, sometimes less fiercely than at others, but never discontinued altogether. At length, a dull, heavy roar was heard, and brighter, broader flashes were seen.

“Those are cannon brought into play,” said Ralph.

“Ay, that will soon settle it,” observed the farmer. “The day-light is coming, too. See, how gray it is out there!”

“Heaven have mercy upon those poor men!” said Hortensia, with a sigh. “Do you not think you hear cries and shrieks, Ralph?”

“No, indeed, dear lady,” replied her companion. “It is your own bright imagination that hears them.”

“They are heard by the ear of Heaven,” rejoined Hortensia. And, bending down her eyes, she fell into a fit of deep thought.

The farmer’s voice roused her. “And now, my lady,” he said, “if you will follow my advice, you will lie down and take an hour or two’s rest—say, till five o’clock. By that time we shall know how matters have gone, though I myself don’t doubt. By that time, too, the chase will be over, and you can get some breakfast, mount

your horse with this young gentleman, and ride away quietly ; keeping to the rear of the army."

"But suppose we should be met by stragglers, and stopped ?" interposed Lady Danvers. "I have a great dread of those troops of Colonel Kirke ; and there being no force with us to protect us, we should be quite at their mercy, were we to encounter them."

"Well," rejoined the old farmer, scratching his head, "I will ride with you till you're out of harm's way ; and we will take two of the lads with us : not that I should be any great protection, or they either, for that matter ; but I think I've got a secret to keep them quiet. I don't believe they'll venture to hurt me anyhow. So now go and lie down and rest quietly, there's a dear, pretty lady."

"I do not think I can sleep at all after what I have seen," answered Hortensia.

"Never mind that, my lady," said the farmer's wife. "It will rest 'ee at any-

rate to lie down. Come with me, and I will shew 'ee the way."

Hortensia followed, and Ralph remained debating with himself whether it might not be better for him to place his fair companion under the charge and safe guidance of these honest people, and entreat them to see her unmolested to the house of some relation, than to persist in accompanying her when his presence seemed but to bring mishap and inconvenience with it. He determined in the end to see her at all events safely beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the field of battle, and then to propose his plan to her, and leave her to decide.

## CHAPTER V.

A small party on horseback rode quietly along upon the very verge of Sedgemoor, where the land begins to slope upwards. They were still upon the moor, however, which, in those days, was a moor in reality ; for few spots on the eastern side of the Atlantic have undergone a more complete change in the short space of something less than two hundred years. A slight elevation of the ground—one of the waves, as it were, of that earth-sea—concealed the travellers in some degree from the field on which the battle had lately been fought ; but this shelter was not complete ; for the little ridge was



irregular, and in some places sank to the level of the rest of the marsh. Nevertheless, the party pursued their way unmolested for more than three miles, not hurrying their horses, nor putting on any appearance of haste or dismay. Lady Danvers was in the front, with Ralph on one side, and the good old farmer on the other ; and their spirits and hopes were beginning to rise, from the impunity with which they had proceeded on their last half hour's ride. They were taking a slanting course, somewhat away from the field of battle ; and Hortensia fondly trusted that every forward step put her and Ralph farther from danger. The old man upon her left, too, was cheerful and light-hearted, and seemed to anticipate no peril or obstruction.

Suddenly, however, as they turned a little angle of the ground, they saw two mounted men with carbines on their knees, fixed motionless right in the middle of the path, evidently posted there to cut off any

fugitives who, after having made good their retreat round the flanks of the enemy's position, might now be seeking to escape by favour of the hollow way.

A little confusion occurred in Hortensia's party as soon as the soldiers were perceived; and one of the farm-servants, who was riding behind, exclaimed, "Let us gallop away across the hill."

"Stay!" enjoined Ralph, whose presence of mind generally came to his aid in moments of danger; "everything now depends upon coolness and propriety of conduct. These men cannot be avoided. We must meet them, and then act according to circumstances."

Thus saying, and begging Hortensia to halt for a moment, he rode on alone, waving his hand to the man who was nearest. He was speedily challenged, and replied at once, "The King — King James."

"Ay, ay," said the soldier, "every one calls out 'King James' this morning, though

many a one hallooed out 'King Monmouth' last night."

"We, at least, hallooed nothing of the kind," said Ralph ; "for I was prevented from going to Bridgewater by hearing that the Duke was there. At all events, you cannot suspect that a lady took any part in such things ; and I trust you will let her pass quietly, as every good soldier ought to do in a woman's case."

"I can't let anybody pass, man or woman," replied the soldier, gruffly. "My orders are strict, to stop every one, and have them examined by one of the superior officers. You must stay where you are and so must every one of your party, till we make the signal from that bit of a mound. Take care that you stay quite still, and do not attempt to move away, or my companion will fire in front, and I will fire upon you in flank."

"We will remain in perfect quiet where we are," answered Ralph, in an indifferent tone ; "but one thing let me add, that we

would greatly prefer to speak to one of the Generals, who probably might know us, than with any inferior officer."

"That's as it may be," returned the man. "I saw the General himself there just now. Perhaps he may look back if he's not gone too far.—Well, you go and stay with the rest."

Ralph returned to his party, and communicated what had taken place, evidently greatly to the alarm of Hortensia.

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid," said the old farmer, in a cheerful tone. "I've got a secret that will tame them, especially if they bring us one of the Colonels or Generals."

But Hortensia's fears were roused for Ralph. "I am not in the least alarmed for myself," she said, in a low voice ; "but indeed, Ralph, you are in a situation of great peril. Will it not be better for you to turn your horse, and try to make your escape the other way?"

"No, no," he replied. "I should only .

bring suspicion on you, and probably be taken before I had ridden a couple of miles. Besides, dear Lady, I am wearied with this continual uncertainty ; and, in truth, I think I have fully as good a chance of passing unobstructed in this direction as in any other."

Hortensia hung her head, and his answer did not seem fully to satisfy her. But no great time was allowed for thought or consultation. In less than five minutes, the heads of a considerable party of military men appeared over the hill ; and, riding at a quick pace, they were soon in the little ravine leading to the spot where Hortensia and the rest were waiting. Preceding them by a step or two, came a man of distinguished aspect, rather above the middle height, and having a countenance which, though not absolutely handsome, was expressive of high mental qualities, if there be any truth in physiognomy or phrenology. The panoply of war had evidently been thrown away since

the battle ; and he was now dressed in the ordinary costume of a gentleman of the Court, with the exception of the large jack boots and long heavy sword, with which no mere courtier would have liked to encumber himself. He gazed with a keen, shrewd, penetrating look upon the party as they rode up ; but when within about five paces, he seemed suddenly to recognise one of the group, and, doffing his hat, he spurred on up to Hortensia's horse, saying, " Dear Lady Danvers, can I believe my eyes ?"

" Yes, indeed, Lord Churchill," she answered, with a well-pleased smile ; for she knew the courtesy of that great, but heartless, man. " And, to tell you the truth, I have some cause to be very angry with you ; for you have been art and part in the offence, I fear, of forcing me many a mile out of my way, breaking my carriage to pieces, and very nearly getting me into the midst of a battle."

' Serious offences, indeed," said Church-

ill, with a laugh ; “but how have I had any share in these terrible acts ?”

“Why, the simple fact is, I have been trying to pass towards Wells with this gentleman, who is escorting me,” said Lady Danvers.

Churchill pulled off his hat, with a low bow towards Ralph, and a keen look at his person ; and Hortensia proceeded.

“I could not effect my object, however ; for I always found some of your troops in the way, and I was not a little afraid of them.”

“Nay, nay, what a satire !” exclaimed Churchill. “We should have treated you with all courtesy, as if we had been knights of old.”

“No satire, but homely truth, General,” returned Lady Danvers, pointedly. “The first we met with was Colonel Kirke’s Tangier regiment ; and his men, we heard from every tongue, were plundering the whole country, and abusing every one who fell into their hands.”

Churchill's brow contracted, and he muttered,

"This is too bad. That man ought to be punished. I hope you did not suffer insult or injury at his hands?"

"No ; but I escaped only by turning down a narrow lane," answered Hortensia, "where my carriage was broken to pieces, as I have said, and I was obliged to mount a horse, and get away as fast as I could. What has become of the carriage and its contents, my maid and my servants, remains yet to be seen."

"I grieve exceedingly that you have suffered such inconvenience," observed Churchill ; "and I can only compensate for it by ensuring that you shall be safely and immediately escorted to Wells, or anywhere else that you think fit to go within reasonable distance.—But who are these three gentlemen behind, in such exceedingly country attire?" he continued, in a louder tone.

"Why, General, don't you know me?"



said the good farmer, riding up. "I saw you at my Lord's head-quarters yesterday morning. There it is, all about it. I am Josiah Bacon; and I think that ought to pass me and every one with me."

And he held forth a scrap of paper which he had taken from his pocket.

"I think I do remember your face," said Churchill, taking the paper, on which were written the following words :

"These are to certify that Josiah Bacon, a true and loyal subject of our Sovereign Lord, King James the Second, has voluntarily furnished eighteen horses for the service of the Royal Artillery; and to require all the faithful lieges of his said Majesty, and officers in the army under my command, to suffer the said Josiah Bacon to pass and re-pass the several posts and stations, upon his lawful business, or the King's good service.

"FEVERSHAM."

Below was written :

"I hereby prohibit any soldiers or offi-

cers being quartered in the house or on the premises of the above-named Josiah Bacon ; and require all men, in the King's name, to give him aid and assistance on every lawful occasion."

"Good," said Churchill, when he had read. "But who are these two men behind?"

"They are only two of my lads," replied the farmer. "You see, General, the way of it was this. Her Ladyship there, and this gentleman, came to my house yesterday afternoon, wanting to make their way to Bristol, or Bath, or Wells, or any of those places, but in a great fright about your soldiers ; for Kirke's lambs had scared them. They had a servant with them then ; and, while we took them in and did the best for them, they sent the man forward—Stilling I think they called him—to see which way they could get on in safety : I heard them with my own ears. So this morning, you see, after watching the battle last night from the windows—and

heartily did we all pray for the King's success—they determined to go on when they heard you had won the victory; but being still a little bit frightened about stragglers from the army and such like, they got me and these two fellows to come with them, to shew them the way and take care of them."

Hortensia had seldom, if ever, so heartily wished a long speech at an end; but Churchill listened with exemplary patience; and when the farmer had done, said,

"Do you assure me, upon your loyalty, Master Bacon, that these two men are actually your farm-servants, and that they took no part in the battle last night?"

"Upon my soul and conscience, they never were out of the house, and have been with me for the last two years," replied the farmer.

"Well, then, you can pass," said Churchill. "Will you ride on with them, Lady Danvers?"

“Come, Ralph,” said Hortensia, joyfully.

But Churchill interposed with a grave look.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “I must ask this gentleman a few questions, before he proceeds with you.”

He paused as if he expected her to go forward ; but Hortensia kept her hand tight upon her bridle. The General then proceeded, saying,

“May I enquire who you are, sir ?”

“A very unimportant personage, my lord,” replied Ralph.

“Not so, I should suppose from your bearing, sir,” interrupted Churchill, in a courteous tone, “though not quite so important as I at first believed. You are about the same height as the Duke of Monmouth ; and I fancied, when first I saw you, that I had caught the bird for which we have been beating the bushes all the morning. I perceive my mistake ; but may I

ask your name ? You must be of the court, I think ; but I have not the honour of recollecting you."

"My name, sir, is Woodhall," replied Ralph, at once.

"Your Christian name?" asked Churchill.

"Ralph," answered the other, calmly.

"Then I fear, sir," rejoined the General, "that I must request you to accompany me to my quarters, and deprive Lady Danvers for a time of the advantage of your escort. I will take care, however, that your place is properly supplied, and that she shall suffer no inconvenience."

"That is all I could desire," replied Ralph.

But Hortensia, fixing her eyes upon Churchill's face, with a look earnest and intense, said, "Does he go as a prisoner, my Lord Churchill ?"

"Not exactly as a prisoner, dear Lady Danvers," replied Churchill ; "but as my

guest for the time." Then, seeing a look of doubt and grief on Hortensia's face, he added, "The truth is, then—I must not conceal it from you—that I have heard at the quarters of Lord Feversham, the Commander-in-Chief, that orders have been given for the arrest of a gentleman of the name of Ralph Woodhall, on some charge—I know not well what. I do not apprehend him myself, because I am not a constable or a messenger ; but I feel it my duty to stop him, in obedience to the intimation I have received."

"Then the offence with which he is charged is not a military offence," said Lady Danvers ; "and if so, there can be no need for Lord Churchill to make himself a constable for the occasion.—I beseech you, my lord, as you must well know that this gentleman has had no share in this most unfortunate rebellion, to suffer him to pass on with me ; for I feel that I have been greatly the cause of his having been placed in this situation. Had he not undertaken

to see me safely to Wells, he would have been many miles from this spot at the present moment."

"Dear Lady Danvers," returned Churchill, with that captivating grace which so peculiarly distinguished him, "you have been now at the Court of England nearly three years, I think. Where few pass unassailed, you have retained an unblemished reputation, and your honour is too high and pure for envy even to attempt to cloud it."

The colour rose in Hortensia's cheek ; for she thought he was about to censure her travelling with Ralph, and point to the effect it might have upon her fair fame ; but Churchill turned his speech quite in a different manner, saying, after a momentary pause, "You esteem this reputation highly, dear Lady Danvers : not the softest or tenderest persuasions would induce you to swerve from the line of duty, or to do one act that could tarnish your name. The honour of a soldier must be kept

equally unsullied : he must be as well prepared to resist entreaties as any beautiful lady in the land, and, be the temptation what it will, must keep his conduct beyond all imputation. Were not this so, I fear I should yield to you at once."

Hortensia seemed still about to remonstrate, but Ralph besought her not, and then spoke a few words in a low tone to the General himself.

Churchill made a sign to the escort which had accompanied him, and spoke with an old officer who rode forward ; and then some changes took place in the disposition of his little force. It was all done very rapidly ; and, while the troopers were cantering in different directions, the General once more advanced close to Lady Danvers, saying, in a low tone,

"Do not be apprehensive about this gentleman, dear Lady Danvers. Doubtless no harm will happen to him. I believe the charge against him is something concerning a duel, not quite regular in its



forms ; but, in these days, such events are never treated severely when the first effect of them upon the public mind is passed. We will endeavour to keep the matter back as long as possible, and there can be no doubt of the result."

" Will you promise me, Lord Churchill, to do the very best you can for him, and on no account to give him up to Colonel Kirke ?" asked Lady Danvers, in a voice trembling with emotion.

" I give you my honour of both," replied Churchill, " and I think you need be under no alarm."

At the same moment, Ralph approached, and, taking Hortensia's hand, bent his head over it, saying, " Farewell, dearest lady ! May God bless and protect you ever !" And, without waiting for reply, he turned his horse, and cantered away.

Hortensia saw that, as he rode, two of Lord Churchill's soldiers joined him ; the one placing himself on the right and the other on the left. Without a word to Lord

Churchill—for her heart was too full to speak—she urged her horse forward on the road she had been previously pursuing. The old officer who had spoken with Churchill, accompanied by two or three troopers, followed and took Ralph's place by the side of Hortensia, saying,

“ Lord Churchill has commanded me, my lady, to see you ten miles on the way—or farther, should you require it.”

Hortensia merely bowed her head in acknowledgment ; and at that moment she would have given much for a veil or a mask ; for the tears were streaming rapidly down her cheeks.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE insurrectionary war was over ; but far the most bloody part of the whole tragedy was about to begin. There is certainly a degree of madness in the vices and crimes of the human race ; a something beyond a mere spirit of evil ; a something that hurries us out of the pale of reason, and teaches mankind to commit, even deliberately, acts which the right use of intellect would utterly forbid. We are all fond of the idea of glory : we feel our hearts glow at the recital of gallant actions : the splendour of great victories, the sounds of triumph, and the shouts of military

success, excite our imagination, and warm the hellish part of the blood in our veins. But what becomes of reason ?

No one has been fonder of such illusions than myself ; no one has felt a deeper thrill in reading of feats of chivalrous daring, or listening to tales of great renown. But let the reader put such achievements to the test to which I put them a few days ago. Let him take a picture of a great battle, where the fancy and the skill of an accomplished painter have done the best that could be done, to heighten the interest and conceal the horrible details of the scene—where the dust, and the grime, and the convulsions are omitted altogether—where the languor of the dying, and the prostration of the dead, are made to group in fair flowing lines around the feet of the trampling horses and the charging corps—where the blood is used sparingly in contrast with the pallor of the faces, to produce an harmonious effect of colouring, and the fiery bursting

of a shell is kept in tone by a stream of gore, lighted by the flash. Let him not strip it of any of the painter's adjuncts—let him leave it embellished as far as the pencil could embellish ; but let him strip it of all that his own fancy has added, and then dissect it under the microscope-glass of reason. Let him look at the combatants, one by one, and ask what they are fighting for.

One, for a name in history, which very likely he may never attain, and which, if he does, will benefit him nothing. Another, because he is commanded to fight by some king or some leader ; spilling his own life's blood, and taking the life of others, at the nod of a man in whose face he would spit if he told him to black his shoes. A third is fighting for pure principles of patriotism, without asking himself if the same, or even higher, ends could not be attained by any other than the butchering means with which he soils his hands. Others (and by

far the greater part) are fighting for—from fourpence to a shilling a day ; and they fight just as bravely, just as gallantly, as the others. The whole are engaged in debasing God's image, breaking God's law, and taking from others the etherial essence they can never restore—the great, the mighty, the inestimable boon of life—for objects and purposes which, two hundred years after, if not utterly forgotten, will be found to have changed but very little the course of events, or influenced the world's history.

But take each of those figures separately—those dark, livid things lying on the ground—and think what has befallen him by this great achievement. That fair-haired youth, lying there, was the hope of a mother's heart ; the only one dear to a widowed bosom ; the support of her age and of her sickness. His last thought, as he felt the life-blood welling away from his side, was his “ poor mother ;” and he saw

before her, with the prophetic eye of death, years of wasting grief, neglect, and gnawing penury, and the workhouse. Then again, that stout fellow somewhat older, with the broadsword still grasped in his dead hand: his fine, open brow, his powerful limbs, all show a man who might have well served his country, and the best interests of humanity, in other fields than this—ay, in better, nobler fields. The last thought of his heart, when he felt the shot, was of his calm cottage in the country, and of the wife and babes he was never to see again: he thought of their future fate—of all the hard chances of life for them, deprived of a husband and a father; and a cloud of doubt came between his parting spirit and his God. Close beside him—slain, probably, at the same moment—lies the hardened reprobate, unchastized, unreclaimed, loaded with wickedness, and sent without a moment's warning, or a moment's thought, into the presence of offended Deity; and there,

hard by, the young and unconfirmed waverer, with much matter for self-reproach in his heart, with a sense of wrongdoing, with aspirations for better things, with resolutions for amendment not yet commenced. And he, too, is sent to his account, without real penitence or heart-breathed prayer, before purpose can become act.

A burning village is in the background, and doubtless many others are near; homes destroyed—families left destitute—sons, fathers, husbands, brothers, slain; weeping in all eyes—agony in all hearts. But this is only one circle beyond the immediate spot; for from that point of “glory” flow far away, on every side, deep streams of misery, and sorrow, and calamity, to which the transient joy and evanescent brightness of a great victory is but as a falling star in a dark night.

It may be said—nay, it *has* been said—that we must not look at these things too



closely. Believe me, reader, that the act or the passion which we dare not look at too closely, is evil. But it needs no such keen examination; for the judgment of the reason is pronounced upon it as soon as it veils itself from inspection.

If such, however, be any true picture of the insane sin of war, what must we think of laws, and customs, and acts, and of the men who committed or made them, by which oceans of blood, shed deliberately on the scaffold, after fierce passion had subsided, have flowed over the page of history, making it little but one scarlet crime. If it be doubtful—nay, more than doubtful—whether it be a less crime than murder to shed the blood of man for anything except murder, what must we think of death, ay, and torture, being inflicted by one human being on another, not only for acts, but for words, and even thoughts? Society must be a bad thing, and a weak one, if it requires to be defended by such crimes as these.

Of all periods, perhaps, in English history, the time of which I write was the one most foully stained by such abominations. The scene was just opening—the tragedy had merely begun—when the battle of Sedgemoor ended. All the forms of law were set at nought : prisoners were slaughtered without trial, as without mercy : on the suspected were imposed tasks more terrible than death ; and the simple well-wishers of an unsuccessful cause, were forced to hang and quarter the victims of tyranny, and imbue their hands in the warm blood of friends, companions, and, we are assured, even relations. The fiend Kirke was busy in his brutal office all day long ; and his ferocious soldiery drank deep of blood, and revelled amidst the carnage in unbridled licentiousness. None escaped him or them, on whom the jealous eye of power fell, except those who could pay enormously for life, from some store unattainable by their death ; for, where there was a choice, Kirke always preferred blood.

Had Ralph Woodhall been given up by Churchill at once to any inferior officer, or even to Lord Feversham himself, it is more than probable his fate would have been instantly sealed. His presence on the field after the battle would have been judged enough. No investigation, no examination of witnesses, would have been deemed necessary : he would have been condemned and slaughtered before he quitted the verge of Sedgemoor.

But Churchill remembered his promise to Hortensia, and fulfilled it honorably. There was something, also, in Ralph's demeanour which he liked ; for, gold and ambition apart, that great General was not insensible to high qualities in others. He was a keen judge of human nature, too ; and there was a straightforward frankness in Ralph's dealings with him, from which he argued so favourably, that he stretched lenity towards him to the utmost. He conversed with him, on his return to his quarters at the dinner hour, for some

time ; treated him with every sort of polite attention, and said to him in the end,

“ It may be some days before I see Lord Feversham, or have an opportunity of delivering you into the hands of those who will insure you a fair and impartial trial. You have answered me straightforwardly in everything, Mr. Woodhall ; and I have not the slightest doubt that you are a man of your word. If, therefore, you will give me your parole of honor to consider yourself a prisoner, and not to absent yourself more than half-a-mile from my quarters, I will free you from the unpleasant attendance of a guard.”

Ralph's parole was, of course, immediately given ; and Churchill continued this liberal course of conduct as far as possible, from the knowledge that the longer a trial is delayed, the more likely is a just, if not more lenient, verdict to be obtained.

The General, however, little knew at the time, that the arch-fiend—compared with whom Kirke was indeed a lamb—was

coming down with all speed to crush those whom military vengeance could not reach. Rumour, indeed, said that the well-known Jeffreys would be sent into the west ; but Churchill fancied, wrongly, that common decency would impel the Court to withhold or restrain this unscrupulous perverter of the law.

Churchill's head-quarters had been moved to a considerable distance from East Zoyland, and he had invited Ralph and some of his own officers to a very plain and homely dinner. Towards the close of the meal, a paper was presented to him, which he read attentively. No change of countenance took place, and he merely said to his trooper, who brought in the paper, "Tell them to wait without."

When the dinner was over, however, and the guests were retiring, he beckoned Ralph to a window, and put the paper he had received into that gentleman's hand. It was an order to deliver him up

to a messenger who was charged to lodge him without delay in Dorchester jail.

“I fear I must obey it,” said Churchill ; “and now I will only add, as a hint, that, as soon as I have given you up, your parole to me is at an end. Many men,” he added, with a meaning smile, and no very unpleasant recollection, “have found safety and fortune by jumping out of window.”

Ralph thanked him, gravely ; and the messenger and two followers having been called in, he was delivered into their hands.

I will not pretend that, had opportunity presented itself, Ralph would have neglected the hint which Lord Churchill had given him ; but the messenger was shrewd and keen, the two officers watchful and severe ; and, at the end of three days, Ralph Woodhall was lodged in Dorchester jail, and experienced, for the first time, a taste of real imprisonment. A low, miserable, damp cell was assigned to him. No

food but bread-and-water, except what he paid for at enormous prices, was afforded to him by the jailer ; and a light was refused when night fell. It was not, indeed, intended that this course of treatment should be continued while he had the means of paying for better accommodation ; but such persecution was what the jailers termed, in those days, “ the taming of a bird ;” or, in other words, the preparation necessary to make him submit quietly to every imposition, however gross.

Thus, in darkness, discomfort, and gloom, with memories and expectations equally painful, Ralph Woodhall passed his first night in the prison at Dorchester, where, for the present, we must leave him. *Oh dear*

## CHAPTER VII.

It was still in the midst of summer ; and London was yet crowded, although the Parliament had risen. The city was in great agitation, too ; for news of the battle of Sedgemoor, and of the defeat of Monmouth, the great Protestant leader, whom the Protestant Church had failed to support—the idol of the people, whom the people, or at any rate all those who were influential amongst them, had left to perish—had reached London on the preceding night, by rapid post from the west. A general gloom hung over the metropolis, in despite of the rejoicing of the Court ; and many a man began to .



regret, too late, that he had not mounted his horse and buckled on his sword, when every arm was needful, and every purse should have been opened, to support the cause which fully one half of the nation had, at least, affected to advocate for many a long year.

But a multitude of those whom timidity, doubts of his right, suspicion of his character, or disapproval of his conduct, had kept from joining the standard of the great insurgent, although truly attached to the cause of religious liberty, had soon personal motives for bitterly repenting that they had not thrown their weight into the scale, while there was a possibility of the balance being turned. The slightest suspicion of having held communication with Monmouth, or the smallest possible evidence of dissenting from the Episcopal Church on any side but Popery, was treated as a high offence : rights, guarantees, statutes, were set at nought ; and many hundreds were snatched from their homes,

and cast into prison, without having committed any other crime than that of entertaining a conscientious objection to the government and the forms of the English Church.

Thus the gloom was increased through the city ; nor was it diminished when men found that a sort of trade in accusations was once more about to commence ; that the Royal bounty was prepared to reward the informer ; and that a multitude of harpies round the Court were ready to make a merchandize of clemency, as far as it could be wrung from the hard, cold heart of James the Second.

All was gloom, then, although bells were ringing, flags flying, and bonfires prepared, when a gentleman, attended by two or three horsemen, rode quickly along what was then known as the Reading Road, and entered the town without slackening his pace. He was impelled by even stronger motives than the reward which had hurried forth the earlier posts ; but, though he took

his way towards Whitehall, it was not at the gates of the Royal palace that he dismounted.

In one of the streets in the vicinity of the Court, was a large house to which I have before led the reader ; and in one of the rooms on the ground floor, at the moment the stranger arrived before the door, sat old Lord Woodhall, reading a broad-sheet which gave an account of the recent battle. He had been very much changed by the events of the last few weeks. He was no longer the stout, hale, robust country gentleman which he had previously appeared ; he was shrunk and exceedingly thin, and old age was marked upon every feature of his face. He was tall and upright still, however ; for the fierce and angry feelings which consumed his corporeal frame, served to give him an energy and a fire which sustained him with unnatural strength.

He was in the middle of a paragraph, detailing, with many blunders and exag-

generations, the closing scene of the battle, the flight of Monmouth from the field, and the direction which he was positively asserted to have taken, when the door was flung open, and Robert Woodhall entered, booted and spurred, and muddy from the road.

“News, news, my noble lord!” he exclaimed, with a triumphant air.

“I have it here, boy,” answered Lord Woodhall, rapping the paper with his finger.

“Ay, but better news than that, noble kinsman,” said the young man, with a laugh. Then, keeping up a tone partly jesting, partly serious, he asked, “What did you promise me, my lord, if I put Ralph Woodhall, the murderer of your son, in the hands of justice?”

“Why,” responded Lord Woodhall, with a good deal of hesitation, “I promised I would give you Margaret, as your mother wishes. But I find she does not love you—cannot love you, she says.”

“Perhaps because she loves her brother’s murderer,” replied Robert, bitterly.

The old nobleman started as if a serpent had bitten him, and exclaimed, “Robert, Robert! do not set my whole blood on fire at such a thought! Beware what you do, sir—beware what you insinuate!—Is the man taken?—is he in prison?”

“Oh no, he is not,” replied Robert Woodhall, in a cool, indifferent tone. “I know where he is, however : I can put him in the hands of justice in eight-and-forty hours, though in double that time he may escape ; for he goes whither he will, and disports himself as a gentleman at large.—But what is that to me, if Margaret loves him better than me, and if your promise is to be unavailing, and your commands to be set at nought?”

The old man advanced sternly towards his companion, took his hand, and wrung it hard, murmuring, in a low, fierce, emphatic tone—

“Robert, you shall have her. Only put

him in my power—only give him to the arm of the law—and you shall have her with all my estates at my death. I say not how soon she shall be yours : she must have time—I must have time—but she *shall* be yours, I pledge you my honour, and my conscience, and my soul. May God curse me, and spare the murderer, if I break my vow !”

“That is all I can desire,” returned Robert. “We will not hurry the fair lady ; and I think, my dear lord, I can soon contrive to clear her mind of any love for Master Ralph, if such a fancy has ever crossed it. Certain tales are down there, which—even without all that poor Henry knew and told her, I believe, of this very honest, religious young man’s fidelity to her—must soon banish from her heart every trace of affection towards him.”

“It is false !” cried Lord Woodhall, vehemently. “She has no affection towards him. She dislikes you, also, because she knows you to be a libertine and a profligate.”

“Better that, my Lord, than a libertine, profligate, and hypocrite too,” answered Robert Woodhall, somewhat nettled.

“That is true, indeed,” returned the old nobleman ; “but no more of that — my word is given, and it shall be kept. Now, where is this man—this murderer ?”

“Down in the west, my Lord,” replied Robert Woodhall ; “but, saving your good pleasure, I must have the management of all this. None but myself must place him in the hands of the officer—I would not share that task with any one, for half a kingdom.”

“Thou art a fine lad, and shall have thy way,” said old Lord Woodhall, attributing to regard for his dead son, the zeal which proceeded in truth from mere personal hatred. “What is it you want now ? —How is it you intend to proceed ?”

“I ask but a letter from you to the Secretary of State,” replied Robert, “desiring him to give me a messenger for the apprehension of Ralph Woodhall, and for

his safe transmission to Dorchester jail ; and you shall have information that he is there lodged, by the very next post from the west."

"The letter you shall have," returned the old man, "and I will keep my word, let come what may. Seek me pen and ink."

The letter to the Secretary of State was accordingly written, and, without asking to see Margaret, Robert Woodhall went on his way rejoicing. At the office of the Secretary of State he was detained some time ; for much weighty business was going on, in consequence of the late important events in the west. An intimation, however, given to one of the clerks, that he was the brother of Lord Coldenham, and fresh from Sedgemoor, at length obtained admission for him ; and the Secretary received him with much courtesy.

"Your brother's regiment did good service, Mr. Woodhall," he said ; "you were with it, I suppose."

"I command a company in that regi-



ment, my lord," answered Robert, with the colour coming rather warmly into his cheek, from a knowledge that in reality he had not been in the battle at all, and that his absence was his own fault. "But your lordship's time is precious, I know, and the business I come upon is very urgent."

Sunderland fixed his eyes upon him for one instant very steadfastly, and the slightest possible smile curled his astute lip, while he said, "What is the business, Mr. Woodhall? I shall be most happy to serve you."

"If you will read that letter, my lord, you will see," replied Robert.

The Secretary perused it rapidly. He made some difficulties, however. It was not customary, he remarked, to send a Secretary of State's messenger to apprehend any one accused of anything but State offences. Common constables, or any ordinary officer of police, might be employed.

“It is not improbable, my lord,” replied Robert, who had a vigorous perseverance in his nature which was not easily baffled—a touch of his mother’s strong determination—“it is not improbable, my lord, that affairs of State *may* be complicated with other offences in this instance. This man was certainly upon the field in Sedgemoor; he is also accused of harbouring, comforting, and defending against the officers of the law, a noted dissenting preacher named Calloway.”

Sunderland still seemed to hesitate; and Robert immediately added, “If your lordship has any scruple, however, it can easily be removed, I think, by an application to the King, who I know is extremely anxious that this notorious offender should be brought to justice. I can go to His Majesty with Lord Woodhall, and return in a few minutes.” And he raised his hat slightly, as if about to depart.

“That is not necessary,” interposed Sunderland, quickly. “I think you have

made out a case ; but recollect that the office cannot be charged with the expenses, unless the young man be taken. Are you prepared to pay them, should you fail ?”

“Perfectly,” replied Robert Woodhall ; “besides I am certain of his apprehension if we proceed quickly. I only trust, your lordship will impress upon the messenger the necessity of despatch.”

All was soon arranged to his satisfaction ; and Robert Woodhall set off with the messenger in two hours from that time.

A change, which may at first sight appear unaccountable, came upon him as he journeyed. Courage, like all other qualities, is very variously modified in different men ; and, besides the two great divisions of moral and physical, has an infinite number of sub-divisions. Some men—especially those of great imagination and hypochondriac temperament—are hesitating and even timid in the contemplation of distant danger, but become bold as lions, and perfectly self-possessed, in the moment of

action. Others—and of them Robert Woodhall was one—are exceedingly brave in determination, but somewhat fearful in execution. When he set out for London from Somersetshire, he had regarded the apprehension of his cousin Ralph with a malevolent pleasure, which made him resolve to see the work done himself, and to have the satisfaction of witnessing, with his own eyes, Ralph's consignment to a dungeon. He pictured to himself, with great delight, the anguish of the man he hated, and his removal from the soft guardianship of Churchill—from which he sincerely believed he could and would escape as soon as the hot pursuit after Monmouth was over—to the horrors and inconveniences of a county prison of those days. All along the road, he had amused himself with such contemplations. He had gloated over Ralph's anticipated sufferings, and had pictured each particular scene as it arose.

But when he had obtained what he

wanted, and was riding back with the messenger and his followers towards Somersetshire, he began to doubt and hesitate. Ralph was fiery, and Robert thought him more so than he really was. There was no certainty that he might not resist; and if he did, his resistance was likely to be dangerous. Robert feared, too, that his cousin might speak unpleasant truths regarding him; and he went on, in his own mind, swelling up objections to any farther personal interference, till in the end he determined to put the messenger and his followers so far upon the track that there was no possibility of their missing the game, and then leave them to hunt it down, taking all the credit to himself, and avoiding every risk.

When the small party arrived at Taunton, Robert was anxious that they should proceed some way farther that night. But the messenger, though a resolute and active officer, was a man who loved his comforts; and he would only consent to go

on after having remained a couple of hours to rest and dine.

Robert had no stomach for his meat ; for he had heard of the move in Churchill's quarters, and he was anxious lest the prey should escape him. He wandered out, then, from the little inn at which he and his companions had alighted, and walked through the principal street of the town, where nothing but signs of gloom and dismay met him on every side, till, standing at the door of a larger inn, he beheld a portly man in the livery of his family.

On enquiry, he found, much to his surprise, that his mother was in the house, and that a messenger from her had been despatched that very evening to Lord Coldenham. In a few moments he was in the presence of Lady Coldenham, who shewed as much gladness at the sight of her favourite son, as she ever displayed on any occasion. She seemed much surprised to hear that he had been in London, but inter-

rupted him in the course of his narrative, to say—

“You should not have been absent, Robert, when you knew that Ralph Woodhall was in the neighbourhood. He has escaped the hands of Colonel Kirke, I find; but he must not escape *us*. Much depends upon it.”

She paused and gazed upon him, with a fixed, glassy sort of stare, and then added, “He must be taken, he must be tried, he must die! If he escape you, you will repent your negligence long and bitterly. He is a viper in the path, which must be crushed, and you should not have quitted this place till he was in prison.”

“If your Ladyship knew what I went for,” replied Robert, “you would approve of my going. You knew, of course, that the murderer was concealed in the house of Lady Danvers.”

“Give him no hard names, Robert,” interposed the old lady, with a bitter smile. “It signifies not to us whether he be a mur-

derer or not. As to that pretty little bright-eyed doll, Hortensia Danvers, she must not stand in my way. She will find herself overmatched, with all her wit.—But what were you going to say? Kirke searched her house, but the bird was flown. I know all that.”

“But you do not know, my dear Lady and mother,” returned Robert, “that since then, Ralph Woodhall has fallen into the hands of Lord Churchill, and is what he calls a prisoner on parole—that is, Churchill gives him every opportunity of flying when he likes. The General would certainly not give him up to a common constable; and I went to London, first to get a messenger to see our admirable cousin, as you object to the term murderer, lodged safely in prison, and secondly, to secure for myself the fruits of my discoveries, in pretty Margaret’s hand and Lord Woodhall’s estates.”

Old Lady Coldenham shook her head gravely. “There will be difficulties there,



I fear," she said ; "the old Lord's last letter on the subject was as cold as ice."

"The difficulties on his part are all removed," replied Robert. "I have his promise, sealed by every sort of vow and imprecation, that, if I lodge Ralph in prison, I shall have Margaret's hand. Any difficulty will lie with her ; but they must be overborne."

"What has she to do with it ?" exclaimed Lady Coldenham. "She must of course marry whom her father tells her. His promise is quite enough, and he will not break it."

"It is to fulfil my part of the bond that I am now hurrying back," said Robert ; "and, as Churchill has no knowledge whatever that I have made any discovery, we shall take him by surprise before he can afford Master Ralph the means of escape. The messenger is here in the town with me—a greedy beast, who spends half his time in eating. I trust he has done his supper by this time, and therefore, with your

leave, will go and see if he be ready to ride forward.—Where shall I find your ladyship when I have fulfilled my task ?”

“ The moment that all is finished, send me a messenger,” said the old lady ; “ and if I have the news that he is safe in the clutches of the law, you will find me at Ormebar Castle the day after to-morrow. —But mind he escapes you not : more hangs upon his life than you know of, Robert.”

“ He shall not escape,” answered her son, confidently ; “ but there is one other man I would fain catch hold of, too, if I can do so without burning my fingers ; one who has insulted me, and been the chosen companion—servant, as he calls him—of this serpent Ralph. I mean old Stilling’s son.”

The colour rose in Lady Coldenham’s cheek, as she answered sternly, “ Let him alone ; you have behaved very ill, boy, and your folly will cost me five thousand pounds. How dare you meddle with the

old man's daughter ? You might have made concubines of all the girls in the village but her, without my caring ; but you know not what you have done. Touch not the young man, however—do not act against him, as you value all that you possess on earth. And now, away. See that Ralph escape you not. That is your business for the present ; we may have more to settle hereafter.”

Robert took his departure gladly ; for a look was upon his mother's face, which he knew too well to remain exposed to her anger willingly.

The result of his farther proceedings is already known to the reader.

## CHAPTER VIII.

ONCE more let us go back to London, and to the house of Lord Woodhall, near the court. In two rooms of that house, a little episode was going on, about an hour after Robert Woodhall's departure. Into each of these I should like to give the reader an insight, but know not well which to proceed with first. Perhaps the one the most completely detached from the story, and having the least influence upon the result, had better be chosen.

We will walk up stairs, then, and into Margaret's room, where she sits with her door bolted, to guard against interruption,

and with two letters before her. She has read one, in the hand of Ralph Woodhall, and it has clouded many hopes, and cast a deep shadow back upon her mind. It has told her that he whom she loves is a prisoner, and that all chance of escape is at an end ; that he must abide a prejudiced trial, and encounter all that the wrath of her own relations can do to destroy him.

But as there are drops of bitter in the sweetest cup, so are there drops of sweetness in the bitterest chalice ; and Ralph's letter has given her the most solemn assurances that he had no share whatever in her brother's death, and that he has loved her ever, and will love her ever, to the last hour of life. He has spoken, too, of Hortensia—freely—frankly—easily ; telling all that she has done for him, and shewing the painful situation in which she had been placed by the result of her generous kindness to the son of her mother's friend.

That was a great satisfaction to her, for Margaret was a woman ; yet, perhaps,

for the same reason, she was not *quite* satisfied. She would certainly have been better pleased, had it been a man who thus befriended her lover. Nevertheless, she felt very grateful, and tried to persuade herself that there was not a vestige of such a thing as jealousy in her mind.

The other letter was written in a woman's hand, more beautiful than was common in those days ; and, though it was open, Margaret had kept it unread till she had twice perused every word in Ralph's epistle. She had only seen the first words ; and those were so familiar, and affectionate that she thought they must come from some well-known friend, though she could not remember the writing. She now turned to it, and read as follows :—

“ DEAREST MARGARET,

“ If to have learned to love you like a sister can give me a claim to call you so, I have a right to use those

words. I write to you in great sadness ; yet I will not be deterred from writing, for many causes induce me to seek personal communication with yourself. Amongst the chief of these, is the hope of serving you in times of difficulty, and supporting you in hours of trial. One very dear to you, and deservedly so, both as a man and as a relation, read me a part of your letter to him, warning him that his residence at my house had been discovered, and that danger menaced him there. Do not think that this was a breach of confidence on his part, for it was absolutely necessary in the circumstances in which he was placed. That letter only served to heighten my affection for you both, and increase my anxiety to serve you. You spoke of gratitude towards me for what I did to shelter and save him. I deserve no such gratitude ; for I acted entirely from personal feelings. He is the son of one whom my mother loved, as few have ever loved a sister ; and therefore I felt he had as much

claim upon me as a near relation. I served him also because I have a deep regard for him, and because I look upon him as injured and persecuted.

“After I had heard your letter, believe me I only redoubled my exertions, and perilled myself, my fortune, and perhaps my name, to save him ; but my own heart is satisfied that I did right, and I do not think you will judge otherwise. We set out in my carriage, and well attended, to seek for some port where he could embark ; but we were met and turned by various parties of contending troops, till in the end my carriage broke down, and I was obliged to fly with him on horseback, travelling with a single servant only. At length, most unfortunately, we were suddenly stopped by a party of Lord Churchill’s horse, and he was immediately made a prisoner.

“I write all these details, because I know there are some about you who may seek to give a false impression of my conduct and



his. The inconveniences I suffered, I care not for at all ; the opinion of the world I little esteem ; but *your* good opinion, dear Margaret, I estimate highly, as it must greatly depend upon that, how much you trust me, and how far we can act together to frustrate the designs of those who wish no good to you, and all evil to him who loves you.

“ Believe not a word they say, Margaret ; believe only that I have acted towards him as a sister to a brother, and that I have done so, ever thinking of you, and of his love for you, and seeking, as one object, to promote the happiness of both. I will own that, when I saw him arrested, I wept as bitter tears as I ever shed, and probably exposed myself to imputations which I did not deserve ; but be assured there is no act of my life that I could have wished you not to see—no word that I have ever uttered to him, that I could not desire you to hear.

“ And now, dear Margaret—believing

this, as I know you will believe it—listen to a few words of counsel from one more world-learned than yourself. Remember that you are surrounded by his enemies—by those who, either from malice or mistake, seek to destroy him, or, if they cannot succeed in that, to deprive him of you. Trust them not, Margaret. Receive everything they tell you with doubt. Be firm, constant, and true to the last ; for, be sure, it is the only road to—the only chance of—happiness. Let them not persuade you to anything that can ever obstruct your union with him ; let them never induce you to give up faith in despair.

“ Far be it from me to urge any child to disobey a parent ; but there is a limit to obedience, beyond which no parent has a right to exact it ; and the less, when any command is founded on passion, prejudice, or error. I see before you many a difficulty, and many a trial ; but still be firm under them all ; and if any service can be

rendered to you, or any support afforded, hesitate not to apply to me.

“HORTENSIA DANVERS.”

Why, I will not stop to enquire; but Margaret wept when she read those lines.

It is now time that we should descend to the room below, in which Lord Woodhall still sat, after his young relation Robert had left him. He had twice read over the news from Sedgemoor, and was reading it a third time, when there was a tap at the door, and a portly and jovial figure entered, in very neat and bright attire. The black silk stockings fitted the sturdy calves of the legs, and the neat ankles, to the utmost nicety. Nothing could be brighter than the shoes. The cassock glistened like a raven's wing; and the round, smooth, well-shaven face, beaming with good-nature and a kindly heart, was almost as lustrous as the gown.

“Well, my dear lord, well,” said Doctor Mac Feely, “I have won my bet, I think. Monmouth has been beaten before the seventh of July, and, therefore, I may claim the living that your lordship promised.”

“You shall have it—you shall have it, parson,” said the old lord, whose spirits Robert’s news had somewhat cheered, “though you have had as narrow a squeak of it as ever ninth pig had, just escaped the tithe. You should have had it, indeed,” he added, in a good-humoured tone, “even if you hadn’t won the bet. You have waited a long time; but you have got a good one now. The presentation was made out the day before yesterday, and you have nothing to do but to go down and ring yourself in. The *dedimus*, too, is made out, and sent down to Giles Somebody-or-other, who will receive your oaths; for, as I told you, you must act as Justice, too, in those wild parts. We know better than to put many parsons in the commission in Lincolnshire.”

“Ay, that’s the worst part of the bargain,” said good Doctor Mac Feely. “I wish I could get over that. I never could bear to send a poor creature to prison, I’m sure.”

“Pooh, pooh !” ejaculated the old peer. “Go and take the oaths directly, the first thing you do ; and, my word for it, you will be as hard as a flint-stone before a twelve-month is over, committing any lad who steals a cabbage or nooses a hare, as readily as you will give a text on a Sunday. If you look in that drawer, you will find all the papers.”

Doctor Mac Feely got them out, with great reverence for the papers, and great joy at his new situation. He was a man by no means destitute of some kind of imagination ; and it is inconceivable what apple-trees he planted in the orchard, and how he ploughed the glebe. When he had got the precious documents in his pocket, however—documents which made him, with the consent of the

Bishop (no very difficult thing in those days) rector of the united parish of Bridlington-cum-Saddletree, and Justice of the Peace in the county of Dorset—he did not forget another errand he had in hand, though it was rather a delicate one.

“I thought I saw Master Robert Woodhall pass by me in the street,” he said, after having thanked Lord Woodhall again and again ; “has he been here ? I thought he was in Somerset.”

“Ay, he has been here, and brought me good news, Doctor. He has tracked out that villain, Ralph ; and before a month is over, I hope the murderer will be hanging as high as Haman.”

“Ah now,” said Doctor Mac Feely, with some hesitation, “that’s just what I wanted to talk about. I can’t help thinking, my lord, that your lordship is mistaken about Master Ralph. I don’t think any thing on earth would have made that young man draw a sword upon your son. Besides,

I have letters from his father, and from the good vicar of the parish. They both say that they are sure he did not do it—nay, more, that it was impossible—and more-over—”

“Is the man mad?” exclaimed Lord Woodhall, starting up from his seat, with a look of indescribable fury in his countenance, “or would he drive *me* mad? Was not the challenge sent, man? Did he not say that he would be on the spot mentioned? Was not the hour appointed? Was not my son killed? Will you persuade me that my poor boy is still alive, when I saw him cold, and stiff, and white, in his bloody coffin? Of what would you persuade me? Henry was killed—at night—without witnesses: Ralph Woodhall killed him; and I will have vengeance.”

The last words were uttered with a shout, and the old man's face was contorted with passion; but Doctor Mac Feely, though not very clerical in all his habits, was roused; and feeling himself, at that

moment, the minister of the Gospel, he replied, in a solemn, and warning tone—

*“Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.”*

The next moment, he stood in the hall ; and then, taking up his hat and cane, he quitted the house.

Rather more than a week after the period of which I have just been speaking, Doctor Mac Feely stood in his little rectory-house, a few miles from the town of Dorchester, and looked about him with evident complacence. A boy in deep mourning, about fifteen years of age, was standing by his side. The house was completely furnished ; plainly, but very neatly. The Doctor was in high good-humour : everything was somewhat better than he expected : the glebe was good and, largely measured—the house solid, and wanting no repair ; the small tithes, as



well as the large, were his, and some of them had come in, so that he was not likely to want butter and eggs in a hurry. There was a prospect, in short, of a pleasant abundance before him ; and, what is still better, of blessed independence. At that moment, he did not care a rush for the whole world.

“ Well, my dear,” he said to the boy, “ and what does your mother ask for the whole of this ?”

“ She says she thinks, sir, two hundred pounds,” replied the boy, modestly.

“ Pooh, pooh !” cried Doctor Mac Feely, some little acquired feeling of parsimony hanging about him. “ A hundred and fifty is quite enough.”

“ The furniture, the cart, and the garden things cost my poor father four hundred ; not eighteen months ago,” said the boy, with a sigh.

“ Ay, but they have been used a good deal since,” replied Doctor Mac Feely, without looking at the lad.

“Well, sir, you must have them for what you will give,” said the late rector’s son. “My mother is very poor, and there are eight of us ; but she says she could not bear to have the things sold by auction—it would break her heart.”

“Eight of you ? God bless the poor woman !” exclaimed the good Doctor, turning and looking the boy full in the face, down which was rolling a large tear. “I didn’t think there were eight of you. She shall have the two hundred.”

“Not if you think it above the value, sir,” said the boy.

“I dare say it is not—I dare say it is not,” said the Doctor, hurriedly, with a gush of warm blood coming into his smooth face ; “besides, I can spare it very well, my man. I have been a great economist, do you see ? And when I made two pennies, I always put by one. That’s the way to thrive, young man, and to keep yourself from getting out at elbows. I have never wanted a whole cassock or a clean shirt

since I came across the herring pond—I won't say much for what was between the two, but that was neither seen nor felt. I can spare the money quite well, I tell you ; so not a word more about it. The bargain's struck ; and tell your mother, my dear, that I will come down and see her to-night, and if I can help you on with your Latin and Greek, I'll do it, and, perhaps, communicate a touch of the genuine dialect into the bargain."

The boy went away, well satisfied with his father's successor ; and Doctor Mac Feely sat down and took some dinner, (prepared by a clean country servant), regretting that he had got no wine in the house to drink his own health on the first day of his residence.

He then leaned back in his chair, to indulge in an afternoon's nap—a habit which he had lately cultivated a good deal. His eyes were just closed ; and two or three deep inspirations showed that his efforts had not been unsuccessful, when the door of the

room was shaken by the opening of the outer door, and the next moment a stranger stood before him.

Doctor Mac Feely started, rubbed his eyes, and gazed at the stranger, who was a young man of powerful frame, though somewhat meagre and haggard in appearance, with a wild, wandering eye, and a broad, but knitted, brow.

"What do you want?" interrogated the doctor, without rising.

"Are you a magistrate?" asked the stranger, in return.

"Yes, by God's blessing, I am Justice of Peace," replied the good Doctor. "What do you want with me in that capacity? I thought you wished to be married, or buried, or christened; for you look in a perilous state of mind, young man, and I don't know which would be most appropriate to your case."

"The second," answered the stranger, sternly. "Christened I have been, by better hands than yours. Married, I shall

never be. Buried, I shall soon be.—But where have I seen your face before?”

“’Pon my soul and conscience, I can’t tell,” replied the Doctor, with a sly twinkle of the eye; “in no place, I hope, where I should not have been. It’s Ireland, perhaps, you’re thinking of.”

“Not I,” cried the stranger. “Lincolnshire, if anywhere; but that must be a mistake.”

“Devil a bit of that,” returned Doctor Mac Feely; “for, if you ever saw me anywhere in the whole world—barring Ireland—it’s just as likely it was in Lincolnshire as anywhere else, for I never lived there a bit longer than I could help, and that was three-quarters of my whole time, seeing that the old lord was so mighty fond of the Hall, and the fox-hounds, and all that, to say nothing of the good wine which was a sore temptation to his carnal nature—and to mine too, it must be acknowledged. The Lord have mercy upon us both, and send us more of it!”

"I have it now," observed the stranger. "You are the fat chaplain who came over with him, and passed a week at Coldenham."

"I never tasted worse stuff in my life," said Doctor Mac Feely, with a bitter remembrance of Lady Coldenham's wine; "and as to fat, there's a leg, boy. Where will you match that?" And he stuck it out from under his cassock, adding, in the same breath, "I can tell you what: that visit to Coldenham—what between the sour wine and the sour woman—took two as good pounds of beef off that same identical leg as ever were cut out of an ox's rump. I thought he'd never plump out again."

"You were reckoned a good man, I think," said the stranger, in the same wild, grave tone.

"Good! to be sure I was," rejoined Doctor Mac Feely. "Did you ever see anybody, who was not good, bloom and blossom like a rose? I always loved everything that was good all my life—a

good bottle above all. I wish I had one now," he added in an under tone—"though I don't object to punch, when nothing else is to be got ; but the devil a drop of rum is there in the house."

"Well then," said the other, taking a paper from his pocket, "I want you to swear me to this deposition."

"Let me see, let me see," cried Doctor Mac Feely, stretching out his hand.

"Not one word," answered the stranger, sternly, "It is all written in my own hand, properly drawn up, for I was bred to be that beastly thing, an attorney ; and all I wish you to do, is, to swear me to the truth of what is contained in this paper, and to attest my signature of it."

"Lord bless you, I'll swear you fast enough," cried Doctor Mac Feely. "I've seen a good deal of that done in my day, on both sides of the water. Lord bless me ! where's the Bible ?—Sally, Sally !—there's a pretty forget !—Sally ! is there such a

thing as a Bible in the house? The old parson must have had a Bible—if not, there must be one in the village.”

“Oh, I’ve got one, your reverence, up in my box,” replied the servant.

“Reverence!” muttered the Doctor. “Bring it me, there’s a good girl. Here’s a gentleman wants to swear a little.”

“Bring a light also,” said the stranger.

“A light at noon day!” exclaimed the worthy divine; “what does the man want with a light?”

“To seal this up when I have done,” answered the other, with an imperturbable countenance.

“Then you may just as well blow the candle out,” said the worthy Doctor; “for there isn’t a bit of sealing-wax in the whole house, so big as a boy’s marble.”

The servant had, in the meantime, disappeared, but soon returned with a light and the Bible. Her reverend master then sent her for a pen and ink; and when all



the preparations were completed, and she had quitted the room, he once more held out his hand, saying,—

“Come, don’t be nonsensical ; give me the paper. I don’t want to read a word of it—to tell the truth, I wouldn’t for any thing less than half a bottle—but I must write at the top, ‘ Personally appeared before me, Peter Mac Feely, Justice of Peace, etcetera.’ ”

“I have done all that for you, except the name,” replied the other. “Put it in there.” And he held the paper before the parson while he wrote his name.

“Now, then, get over the swearing,” said Doctor Mac Feely. “Take the book in your right hand, and the paper in your left : mind your thumb, boy, when you kiss the book—the cover’s not over clean ; but it’s as good as your own, I fancy. Now we’ll be serious—if possible. It’s an awful job, swearing : you know the nature of an oath, I suppose ?”

“Better than you do,” answered the stranger stranger, fiercely ; “for you have taken many an oath that you have broken to God, if not to man.”

Then, in a clear and audible voice, and without any prompting, he proceeded to swear to the truth of every word which that paper contained ; and finally signed his name to it in a bold, free hand.

Doctor Mac Feely then attested the signature, exclaiming, as he did so, “Gaunt Stilling !—Now I recollect. Stilling was the old clerk and sexton at Coldenham ; many a chat we have had together. Gaunt was his son, who had been in the Tangier regiment—you are gaunt enough now.—Why, what, in the name of misfortune ; has changed you so, lad ?—I *do* recollect you, only you look ten years older. Come, take a cup of ale ; there’s that in the house, at all events.”

Gaunt Stilling waved his hand. “You shall have this within three days,” he said. “It will not be wanted before then.”

“Three days ! I shall be at the assizes in three days,” said the parson.

“You must wait till you receive this,” returned Gaunt Stilling ; “and then act with it as I shall direct you. The assizes will not be at Dorchester for four days at least. The commission was only opened at Winchester on Monday. And now, Good bye. You are not a bad man at heart, I believe. I recollect the sermon you preached in Coldenham Church ; and you spoke bold words upon the vices of the great, which did you honor. Do not forget your Master’s service, in seeing justice done to the innocent. Be bold, and true to the right ; and that may cover a multitude of little sins like yours.”

“Whew !” whistled Doctor Mac Feely ; “as if a man were a bit the worse for liking a good bottle and a slice out of the haunch, to say nothing of the fat ! I can prove that it’s a crying sin to neglect such mercies. All the fathers held it so ; and,

when I write their *lives*, I'll make it appear, whatever their *doctrines* might be."

But Gaunt Stilling waited for no such proofs ; and, after rubbing his good, broad forehead for a moment, Doctor Mac Feely sank back in his chair again and resumed his nap.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE very name of Jeffreys spread terror and despair through the various prisons in the West of England in which the unfortunate participators in Monmouth's rebellion were confined. He was known to be the unscrupulous tool of arbitrary power. He was known to love blood, and to revel in misery. He was probably the only Judge who ever disgraced the English bench by openly rejoicing in the power to torture or to slay. He was the terror of the bar, the browbeater of witnesses, the bully of a jury. With sufficient knowledge of the law to twist it to his own pur-

poses, and make it serve the ends that were dictated to him ; with sufficient contempt for it to set it at nought when it interfered with his designs ; with a sagacity and clearness of judgment which were applied only to derive, from any case, all the arguments that it could afford in favor of a prejudiced judgment ; with an impudent daring, befitting nothing but the brothel or the gambling-house ; he feared no consequences, so long as his savage instinct could be gratified—he shrank from no opprobrium, so long as it was a means to wealth and power.

The news soon spread far and wide that Jeffreys was coming down to judge the prisoners in the west. This was speedily followed by intelligence of his having opened the commission at Winchester ; of his having tried the Lady Alice Lisle for harbouring two unfortunate rebels ; of his having violated the first principles of justice and the strict letter of the law ; of his having brow-beaten, insulted, and abused the witnesses ; and wrung, by threats and

violence, a verdict of guilty from a reluctant jury. Then came the sentence, that the individuals thus convicted should be burned alive in the public market-place ; and then the mockery of mercy in the commutation of the sentence to another kind of death.

Dismay spread through all hearts ; for no man found himself safe, however conscious he might be of innocence. The safe-guards of law and justice were gone. Party prejudice, private malice, cupidity, revenge, caprice, could at any time aim a blow at their victims from the judgment-seat ; and men learned to fear enemies whom they had previously contemned and scorned.

If such was the feeling produced throughout the public, what must have been the sensations with which prisoners, already accused, heard the fatal tidings that Jeffreys was coming on into the west !

The savage jailers of the prison in which Ralph Woodhall was confined—

men of the basest minds and lowest habits—took care that he should have the whole intelligence piece by piece. As far as personal comfort was concerned, they had consented, for high considerations, to improve his condition : he had a comfortable room in the Governor's house : his food was no longer bread and water : pen and ink was allowed, and a good and honest lawyer was admitted to him. But the jailers, who loved misery next to money, took part payment for the conveniences they were bribed to allow, in torturing the prisoner with continual thoughts of his coming fate.

To say that Ralph gave himself up to despair, would convey no proper idea of the condition of his mind. He gave himself up for lost, indeed, and prepared to meet the worst with firmness ; and in this respect, perhaps, a knowledge of the character of his Judge was serviceable to him. There was very little uncertainty—the most unnerving of all agonies—to be struggled with.



He had not to think of chances, and calculate probabilities, and vacillate between hope and fear. He had only to prepare. Had any just Judge been the person to try him, he would have entertained no doubt, no apprehension ; for his full consciousness of innocence made him imagine that his innocence must be clearly established. But with a Jeffreys on the bench, with the known corruptibility of that Judge, with all the strong influence and great wealth of Lord Woodhall arrayed against the prisoner, there was little—there was no—chance, of an acquittal ; and he felt that nothing remained but, by an honest and firm defence, to keep his name pure for after time, and to make ready to die with manly fortitude.

That was a bitter task enough. He was in the bloom of youth, full of the fresh vigour of early manhood, with every capability of enjoyment unimpaired, with the bright, cheerful world unclouded by disappointments, unsullied by vice. All that he had seen of life, up to a few previous

months, had been calm, cheerful happiness ; and he had now to part with all. Hope, too, had opened her garden-gates before him ; and, but a short time previously, he had been breathing her odours and revelling amongst her flowers.

Now, he must part from all : the bright expectations of love—the long vista of happy hours, ever open to the eye of youth—the high aspirations—the brilliantly-painted pictures of fancy—were all to be given up together, and buried with him in the dark, cold grave. The strong energies, the warm, chivalrous courage, the firm, enduring resolution, the activity of thought, the might of a strong mind, which, exercised with honour and with faith, he expected would lead him to distinction, were all to come to an end upon a public scaffold ; and a death of dishonour was to close a brief, bright life of honest effort and unstained integrity.

For all this he had to prepare ; but he did so, and did it well.

He wrote to his father, to Margaret, to Lady Danvers, and to Lord Woodhall; and on each letter he wrote the words, "To be delivered after my death." To all, he gave the most solemn assurances, as a dying man, that he had no share whatever in the death of his cousin Henry, adding, that he trusted to make the facts so clearly appear at his trial that, when prejudice and passion had subsided, not one man would deny his innocence. At the same time he declared the conviction that he should be condemned, alluding only generally to the circumstances which rendered that conviction reconcileable with the full consciousness of innocence.

His lawyer was active and eager. Something in the young man's demeanour, in his calmness, in his firmness, in a certain cheerful tone with which he spoke of his coming fate, touched the good man much; and he took more than a mere mercenary or professional interest in the case. Ralph let him do

what he would, but showed considerable indifference to all the legal and technical points connected with his situation. He answered all the questions that were put to him, frankly and sincerely, and gave a clear and full account of all the events affecting the case, as far as he knew them, mentioning the names of every one who had taken more or less part in the transactions which I have recorded.

The man of law rubbed his hands, and declared that, if the evidence of the persons mentioned could be procured, there was no doubt about obtaining a favourable verdict. One point, he said, required some consideration. The trial ought to take place in the county where the alleged offence had been committed.

“Doubtless,” he added, “the Crown is prepared to change the venue; and that is done so easily now-a-days, that any motive will suffice, where the Crown is concerned. I should not wonder to find that, in this instance, the pretext is, the difficulty and in-

convenience of moving you to Norfolk, without the slightest consideration of the difficulty and expense to you of moving your witnesses hither. Perhaps, indeed, the case may not come on, and you may still be sent to Norwich; but even then my labours will not have been in vain, for your defence will be fully prepared."

Ralph smiled faintly. "You have furnished me with the first ground of hope," he said; "and I am almost sorry for it. In Norfolk, I shall certainly be acquitted. Here, I should be as certainly condemned: But I will not give way to any expectations. Those who are determined to condemn me, have taken their precautions, depend upon it; and be you sure, the venue will be changed."

"Well, well, it gives us a chance," said the lawyer. "Great men sometimes make great mistakes; and an oversight may have been committed in this instance."

At this time, he had stayed with Ralph, as was sometimes his custom, for several

hours, and day had declined into night when he took his departure.

The old town of Dorchester was, I believe, not very much less in size at that time than at present. It was always a prosperous and quiet town; not greatly celebrated for any manufacture but that of ale. The streets were then very narrow and tortuous; and the houses opposite to the prison itself, were only separated from the outer wall, surrounding the old building, by a road not four yards broad. They were low, mean houses, inhabited by the poorer classes, and have long since been swept away.

Under the eaves of one of these houses, when the attorney came forth from the prison-gates, he perceived a man standing with his figure clearly displayed by a light in one of the windows; for no lamps were in the town at that period. It was a rainy night; and, as the roof projected far, it afforded a shelter. The moment the attorney moved on, however, the

man followed him, and, at the end of the street, overtook and tapped him on the shoulder.

“I want to speak with you,” he said, in a civil tone. “Is your name Danes?—Are you a lawyer?”

“Right in both,” replied the attorney. “What do you want with me?”

“*I* want nothing,” answered the man; “but a lady wishes to see you directly—a great lady, too, whom you must have heard of, if not seen.”

“Who is she?” asked the attorney.

“Come with me, and you will know,” replied the man. And Mr. Danes followed him with the full determination of taking to his heels, if his guide conducted him to any place of suspicious appearance.

Far from so doing, however, the man led him to one of the most frequented parts of the town, and to the house of one of the most respectable inhabitants—a gentleman well affected to the reigning family, and

in some favour with the powers then existing.

“Why, this is Mr. Winkworth’s house,” said the attorney.

“Very true,” rejoined the man, laconically, and opened the door; for doors in Dorchester, at that time, remained generally unlocked till the family retired to rest. “Come up,” he added.

Passing several doors in the great hall, through which the sounds of conversation found their way, he led his companion up a broad, venerable stair-case, of carved oak, and opened a door, saying, “Master Danes, my Lady.”

The attorney entered the room; and, though it contained only two persons, he felt dazzled, as it were, not so much by the bright light which succeeded suddenly to darkness, as by the blaze of beauty before him. He paused a moment in his advance, thinking he had never before beheld two such beautiful creatures as those which were seated near the table,



with hand clasped in hand. One was dressed in deep mourning ; and, on the table beside her, lay one of those black half-masks, very commonly worn by ladies of that day, and known in France by the name of *loup*. The other was richly attired in the style of the court ; but even the costume which, by that time, was becoming stiff and rigid, could not conceal the exquisite beauty of her form. About the one was a certain wild freshness and youthful grace, which was very captivating ; while the other, though evidently only a few years older, had a sort of quiet dignity and self-possession in her carriage, which spoke the long-accustomed guest of courts.

The lawyer had not much time to observe, however, before the voice of the elder lady said,

“Come in, Mr. Danes, and take a seat, if you please.”

He thought he had never heard such music in his life as the tones which came from those sweet lips ; and, advancing to the

table, he remained standing with his wet hat in his hand.

"You have seen me before, Mr. Danes," said the lady who had spoken; "but, perhaps, you do not recollect me."

"I cannot say I do, my lady," replied the lawyer; "and yet I do not think I could forget you, if it had ever been my good fortune to see you."

"I was a little girl," she rejoined, with a faint smile. "You may, perhaps, recollect Hortensia Danvers."

"Oh, God bless me, my lady!" said the lawyer, with a look of delight, "I remember you quite well, and your noble father, and your excellent lady-mother. I owed my first success in life to them. What can I do to serve you? Nothing can give me greater pleasure, if it be in my power."

Hortensia made him take a seat, and then informed him that, having heard he had been engaged to prepare the defence of Mr. Ralph Woodhall, she had sent for him to enquire his opinion of the case, and

to offer whatever assistance might be wanted, and which she could give.

“The case would be very clear, my lady,” replied the lawyer, “if we could count upon a fair jury and an unprejudiced Judge.—I must speak plainly ; for the matter requires it.—We know that his Lordship, who is coming down here, is subject to all sorts of influences ; and, to tell you the truth, I discover—what I have kept from the gentleman himself—that no means, however unscrupulous or iniquitous, are neglected by the relations of the dead man to get a verdict against the living one.”

“Hush!” ejaculated Hortensia, with a glance towards her fair companion ; “hush, Mr. Danes ! Do not impute such great blame to persons only moved by deep love for one whom they have lost.”

“Let him speak, dear Hortensia,” said Margaret ; “let him speak plainly. It is necessary for you and for me to hear the truth, however bitter it may be.”

“Indeed, my lady,” said the lawyer, “in a matter of this kind, where life and death are concerned, one cannot stop to pick words. If Mr. Ralph Woodhall should be tried here, a verdict is very likely to go against him ; for the most powerful influence is being used to prejudice the minds of jurors, and the same influence will undoubtedly be exerted upon the Judge.”

“But can he not be tried somewhere else ?” asked Hortensia.

“He ought to be tried in Norfolk,” replied Mr. Danes ; “but the Crown can change the venue, and there is only the remotest possible chance of their neglecting to do so till too late for these assizes. They won’t stand upon any forms of law, depend upon it, and, perhaps, may break through all recognised principles of justice ; but then, we may thwart them if they make any mistakes, though few men at the bar dare to face Jeffreys.”

“The boldest, the most skilful, the most

learned, must be retained, at whatever cost," said Hortensia, eagerly. "I make myself responsible for the amount, Mr. Danes, whatever it may be. Hesitate at no expense whatsoever ; use all means that may suggest themselves ; for, in proportion to the vigour of the efforts made to oppress, so must be the vigour of our efforts to defend."

As she spoke, she laid her hand upon Margaret's, and pressed it gently ; and, if there ever was abnegation of self in a woman's heart, it was in Hortensia's at that moment.

"This is very necessary kindness, my lady," said the attorney ; "for witnesses have to be brought from a distance, and the little means we have will be consumed in that part of the affair. The fees of eminent lawyers are very great ; and my only hope was that old Mr. Woodhall might arrive and furnish a farther supply ; but he has not come."

"Let not that stand in the way for a moment," replied Hortensia. "I am responsible to you for any amount employed in this case."

"If so," said the lawyer, gazing at her with an inquiring look, "we might make an experiment on the Chief Justice himself. I think it would answer, if the sum were large enough."

The blood rushed into Hortensia's face, and there was an evident struggle.

"I cannot say that," she answered ; "I cannot tell you to do anything that is wrong ; but this I will say, Mr. Danes. Do all that is necessary to insure that real justice be arrived at, and I will shrink from no engagement that you make for me.—Now, can you explain to me some circumstances which I do not understand ? It appears, even to my eyes, unlearned in the law as I am, that it may be necessary and right to summon myself and all the servants who were with me at the Duke of

Norfolk's when this supposed quarrel took place, to give our evidence at the trial. But I find that several other persons attached to my household, who were not near the spot, but resident at Danvers New-church at the time, have likewise received notice to appear. What can be the cause of this, Mr. Danes?"

"Rather strange, certainly, my lady," replied the lawyer, musing. "But was not Mr. Ralph Woodhall at your house for some time after the event?"

"He was," responded Lady Danvers. "But I see not how that can affect the question whether he did, or did not kill his cousin in a duel, and whether the circumstances attending that duel were fair."

"They may think they can prove admissions of some kind," rejoined the lawyer. "Still, I will acknowledge, it strikes me as strange; and where it is evident that there is an intention to *persecute* rather than *prosecute*, one does become suspicious of every move in the game. I

will tell you what I will do, my Lady. I know something of most of the men engaged in the courts here. Some of them have already given me information as to the unfair means which are being employed to secure a condemnation. I will go and see if I can discover any motive for the proceeding you mention. Can you give me the names of your people who have been subpoena'd?"

Lady Danvers wrote down five or six names on a piece of paper, and at the head of them appeared that of the steward, Mr. Drayton. Furnished with these, the attorney went on his way.

Margaret and Hortensia remained for some time alone, conversing sadly on the topic which occupied the thoughts of both. Other subjects, connected with Margaret's own fate and circumstances, mingled from time to time in their discourse; and when, at length, she rose to go, Hortensia repeated twice the injunction to be firm.

"While there is life there is hope, dear.



Margaret," she said ; "and, though your fate may never be united to that of the man you love, you owe it to him, methinks, never to wed one whom you so justly abhor as Robert Woodhall. What I have told you this night of the character of that man, is more than mere hearsay ; and I should as soon expect oil and water to mingle, as you to give your hand to him. I must not go with you back ; for, doubtless, your father has returned by this time, and I should be no very welcome guest, I suspect ; but two of my men shall accompany you, though, in this good town of Dorchester, one might walk alone, I believe, without much risk."

"I hope my father has *not* returned," said Margaret, timidly. "I fear he might be angry at my absence. He has become exceedingly irascible since I refused to listen to Robert Woodhall's suit. He never shewed me such unkindness before." And the tears rose in her eyes, while she added, "Where shall I find my maid?"

"We will call her in," replied Lady

Danvers. After having summoned the woman from another room, Hortensia kissed Margaret tenderly, saying—"Hope still, dear girl, hope still."

"Ay, hope still!" repeated Lady Danvers to herself, when Margaret had left her. "*You* may hope, poor Margaret. One of the strange turns of fate may open before *you* long vistas of happiness. For me, the view is closed all around.—Well, I can be an anchorite."

A few minutes after, Mr. Danes returned; but it was only to bring the intelligence that he could obtain no information. He seemed even more doubtful and suspicious, regarding the circumstance to which Lady Danvers had called his attention, than before.

"Either the people themselves, who are immediately employed, do not know the motives," he said, "or they will not tell them; and, in either case, the matter does not look well. There must be motives for secrecy somewhere; and that, in such

a case as this, where simple justice is concerned, is in itself suspicious. However, my lady, all that we can do is to prepare the defence as carefully as possible. I must send off fresh messengers eastward this very night to hurry our witnesses ; for I hear that his Lordship is making speedy work of it on the way ; and it would not surprise me if Mr. Woodhall were refused even a postponement of the trial, although our defence should necessarily be incomplete."

He went on to ask Lady Danvers some questions as to what she could testify concerning the events of that night on which Henry Woodhall's death had taken place ; and then left her with a mind only the more depressed from enquiries, the object of which she did not altogether see. She expressed her perfect readiness and willingness, however, to be called as a witness for the defence ; and Mr. Danes went away convinced that she would give her evidence well and firmly.

## CHAPTER X.

THOSE who have remained a length of time in Dorchester or its neighbourhood, will know that, within a circle of not many miles diameter around that town, several spots are to be found as wild and solitary as in any part of the island of Great Britain. On the side of Weymouth, especially, are some scenes in the midst of which one might fancy oneself very far removed indeed from the high cultivation which closely surrounds them.

In the days of James the Second, when agriculture, as a science, had made little advance upon the knowledge posses-

sed by the Anglo-Saxons, and when cultivation had spread but slowly under the influence of a great many deterring causes, these solitary spots were, of course, very numerous in all counties of England ; and upon one of them, in Dorsetshire, not very many miles distant from the capital of the county, was built an ancient fortified house, dating, probably, from two centuries before. It was placed upon an eminence overhanging a river, brief in its course, and utterly unimportant till it reached a point about five miles from its mouth, where it widened out into a creek or narrow bay of salt water, which afforded a convenient refuge for fishing-boats. Near a spot where the first considerable extension of the banks of the stream took place, a sort of sandy bar had formed itself, marking the navigable from the un-navigable water; and it was just at this point that the house, or castle as it was called, had been built. I will name the river the Orme; and from it, and the sandy bar I have mentioned,

the house had derived the name of Ormebar Castle.

The neighbouring ground was covered with smooth green turf, or short but rich grass, and swelled in easy undulations, watered by many a clear and beautiful stream. Such a thing as a hedge-row or a wall was not to be perceived for some miles round the enclosure of the park. It was a gloomy-looking building, too, consisting of tall, wide, irregular masses of masonry, put together anyhow; and one could easily see, outside, from the numerous and very much varied windows, and from the immethodical distribution of the chimneys about the house, that, in searching for any room within, one might have a real journey to go in order to reach a door hard by.

In this curious old building, and amidst the solitary scene around, a little party had met together on the night of Margaret's visit to Hortensia. The kitchen and the hall were well tenanted—better, indeed,

than they had been for many a year—inasmuch as a considerable household had been transported there from a distant part of the country, in addition to two or three old servants, who had remained for years in the place. But in a large, curious, old-fashioned hall above, only three persons were seated at the hour of sun-set. They were a mother and her two sons; and they grouped themselves together near the window, not to watch the passing away of the western light, but upon business which two of them, at least, considered of no small importance. In the midst, on a tall, high-backed, velvet-covered chair, with a whipstool under her feet, sat old Lady Coldenham. Her eldest son was on her right hand, looking listlessly out towards the sea, in a direction where the tower of a little church was just visible over the slope of the ground. His arm was thrown over the back of the chair; his head leaning on one side;

and his whole figure disposed in an attitude of graceful idleness. On the other side appeared his brother Robert, with a very different air. He leaned rather forward than otherwise, with his right hand resting on his knee, and his eyes fixed upon his mother, as if waiting for some oracular word from her lips.

At length, as the day began to grow dim, Robert said, " Shall I call for lights, madam ?"

" No," replied Lady Coldenham. " I love this sort of light—ay, and enjoy seeing the stars come out one by one, as darkness resumes her sway over the earth like a powerful monarch triumphing in stern serenity over some weak and glittering pretender who had disputed his sway. Besides, Robert, it is full as well to talk of all we have to notice, under the shadow."

She paused, and relapsed into silence again ; and then, when the sky was nearly dark, she added, " You have done your part well, Robert ; and now we must make sure



that the blow goes home. You have lodged him in prison, as you promised—but he must die.”

“I think you may leave that to the care of the good old Lord,” observed Robert. “He is as eager for his blood, as a hound for the blood of a deer.”

“I will leave it to no one with entire trust,” replied Lady Coldenham. “Too much depends on the event, to have anything risked by the conduct of a blundering old man, or a heedless, inattentive lawyer.”

“I wonder what poor Ralph has done,” said Lord Coldenham, breaking silence for the first time during a quarter of an hour, “to make you two so bitterly his enemies. One pursues him like a bloodhound, and the other says he must die.”

Lady Coldenham fixed her large, dark eyes upon him with a look of angry astonishment; but the young lord had long been growing somewhat restive, and he repeated, “I wonder what he has done!

What is his fault ? I should like to know."

"He is his father's son," remarked Lady Coldenham, with stern emphasis.

"I did not know that that was any greater crime than being one's mother's son, but rather a virtue," retorted Lord Coldenham, with a light laugh. "As to the father, I don't see much harm in him, any more than in Ralph. He is a very good sort of old gentleman—rather pedantic, it is true ; but not much the worst for that. Shrews, pedants, and libertines, are, I suppose, necessary evils in our state of society ; but, as I don't approve of persecuting them, I think I had better leave this rather intolerant council, and amuse myself elsewhere."

As he spoke, he rose ; but Lady Coldenham exclaimed, in a fierce tone, "Sit down, Lord Coldenham !"

"No, indeed, dear mother," replied the young Lord. "I can employ myself better. There is Robert, who is peculiarly fond of

either sitting or running—which was it you did at Sedgemoor, Bob?—I am too active for the one, and am not much given to the other; and so, with your blessing, I will walk.”

Lady Coldenham eyed him with an expression of anger, surprise, and contempt, which could hardly be described; but the young lord had chosen his part, and, though idle enough in his habits, he was resolute. His mother’s look nettled him a little too; and he went on, in a cool but determined tone,

“In a word, dear Lady and mother, I am of age, I think, and master at least of my own *actions*. I do not desire particularly to be master even of my own house, as long as it has got so much better a master in it; but I will not be here, consenting to things that I disapprove and dislike, let it cost what it may.”

“Hark you, Coldenham,” cried his mother, as he moved towards the door. “A word in your ear, if you please.”

He bent down his head, listening gravely and the lady whispered something to him, gradually raising her voice till the last words became distinct and audible enough. They were, "And leave you a beggar and an outcast, at a word."

"Do it!" returned Lord Coldenham, with the most indifferent tone in the world, and quietly sauntered out of the room.

Lady Coldenham shut her teeth tightly together, and the violent emotion that was going on within might be seen by the close clenching of her white hands as they lay upon her knee; but she made no comment, and perhaps was sorry for the words she had uttered. They had not escaped the ears of Robert Woodhall, and he might build upon them some strange expectations. But he was wisely silent; and, after a very long pause, Lady Coldenham resumed the conversation, saying,

"Let us think no more of that foolish boy's caprices. You are a rational being, Robert. Tell me what you think of this

case. Are we certain of getting a condemnation ?”

“ Really, I do not know, dear lady,” he answered ; and then added, with some emphasis, “ That must depend upon the Judge and the jury.”

“ They must both be taken care of,” rejoined Lady Coldenham, slowly nodding her head. “ I will crave an audience of Jeffreys when he first arrives. He will not refuse me. *You* must see to the jury, Robert ; and, if the youth be really guilty, there surely can be no great difficulty in proving him so. Tell me, upon your honour and soul, do you really think he committed the deed ?”

“ Upon my honour and soul, I do,” replied Robert Woodhall ; and, for once in his life he spoke the truth. Nay, more, he carried his frankness farther, adding, “ But I do not doubt it was all done fairly. Ralph, I have heard, was reputed the best fencer in his college, and the best quarter-staff-man in all Lincolnshire. Three or

four passes would soon settle the matter with Henry, without any foul play. That letter of Henry's, too, written with his absurd generosity, clears away all suspicious circumstances. That is the worst point of the case against us; for juries are not fond of condemning men for duels where no unfairness is proved."

"Cannot the letter be suppressed?" asked his mother.

Her son shook his head, and she went on to say—

"It is in Lord Woodhall's hands."

"No, in the Duke of Norfolk's," affirmed her son. "He gave the old lord a copy, but he kept the original."

"This is frightful!" exclaimed the old lady, in an under tone. "He will escape us yet: the only chance is with the jury, Robert. Two or three sturdy men must be found amongst them, who will starve the others out, and get us a verdict. Hark! there are horses' feet! The old lord himself must

be coming. He promised to bring a great lawyer with him, who will enter into our views. But mind, be not too rash—speak not too plainly, boy ; for these men, sometimes, take fire when their own image is shewn them in too perfect a glass ; and they assume a fresh honesty, only to show us that our thoughts of them were calumnious.”

“No fear of my being too rash,” replied Robert Woodhall. “Besides, I shall apply myself principally to this business with Margaret. It seemed to me that the old lord wavered before her steadiness ; but I will not be kept in suspense. I will know at once whether he intends to keep his oath or not.”

“There is business on hand,” said Lady Coldenham, very gravely, “more serious than any pretty, painted poppet in the world.”

“Ay, but the estates, mother,” suggested her son.

"True," she answered; "true—the estates."

At this moment, Lord Woodhall entered the room, followed by a man in dark clothing, whom he presented to Lady Coldenham as Counsellor Armitage.

The conversation was led at once to the predominant subject in the thoughts of all; and it was discussed for some time, principally by Lord Woodhall, Robert, and Lady Coldenham, who stated briefly, but distinctly, the new-born fears of failure which her son's previous words had suggested.

The lawyer, who had listened attentively, but had made few remarks, now interposed, saying,

"Do not be afraid, Lady Coldenham. We will take care that justice shall be done; and if, through the weakness of a jury, it could not be done in one way, it would be done in another. It matters little for the true course of Justice what are the means employed so that the end be favor-



able to herself. We will reach him, depend upon it, let him attempt to conceal the facts if he will and if he can. The case of the slaughter once clearly proved against him, we must overcome the scruples of the jury—and, if not, it does not much matter.”

“Does not much matter!” echoed Lady Coldenham, with a stare. “I do not understand you, sir.”

“I am instructed for the Crown, Lady Coldenham, and that is the reason why a great number do not understand me,” replied Mr. Armitage, with a slight smile at what he imagined to be a jest. “All I can say is, you shall be satisfied, and this good lord too. The young man has evidently committed a great crime; and not even the foolish lenity of a jury shall save him.”

“No, I trust there is no chance of that,” said Lord Woodhall. “He killed my son, and I will have justice.—Now I have found him, I will never leave him till I have

justice. I am an old man to take such a journey as this from London to Dorchester in three days; but the spirit that brought me down here, will support me to follow him all over the world, till I have justice upon his head."

"There will be plenty to second you, my noble lord," said Robert Woodhall. "I, for one, cannot rest satisfied so long as this man is with me on the earth; for it is very clear to me now, that I shall never have the love of my promised bride, so long as he lives."

Lord Woodhall was silent, and Robert Woodhall, finding that his indirect mode of proceeding produced no reply, asked boldly, "If she persists in her refusal, what do you intend to do, my lord?"

"Keep my word, young man," replied the old Lord, drily; and then, turning to Lady Coldenham, he enquired, "Where is your eldest son, madam? I thought to find him here."

"Oh, never mind him," responded Lady

Coldenham. "He is in the house, I believe; but, with his idle whims, he is more likely to spoil all than to help in anything. He is better out of the way.—As to Margaret," she continued, "you must let me see her, my good Lord. Women can often find means of persuasion when men fail."

"See her, if you like, Lady Coldenham," said the old lord; "but it will make little difference. I have pledged my word, and it shall be kept. She must obey. But, as to your son, I am sorry he goes not with us in this business. What is the reason?"

"Oh, none," replied Lady Coldenham; "unless it be old affection for this young man. Depend upon it, he is better out of our councils. And now, sir," she continued, turning to Mr. Armitage, "will you explain to me clearly how the case stands—what are its chances—and what remains to be done to make those chances secure? Remember, I am accustomed to deal with lawyers, and will not be put off with words."

She had hardly uttered these syllables, in a stern, masculine tone, when a loud voice, rich and deep and full, was heard, saying—

“Beware! Once more I tell you, Catherine, beware!”

The three gentlemen looked round; for, so clearly were the words enunciated, and so distinctly were they heard, that the speaker seemed to be in the room; but no one was to be seen, and Robert’s voice soon called attention another way, as he exclaimed,

“Good God! my mother has fainted.”

It was long before Lady Coldenham could be brought to herself; and, for a time those who surrounded her thought she was dead, so still and breathless did she lie, and so cold did her hands become. Lord Coldenham was sent for in haste, but he could not be found; and the only intelligence that could be obtained regarding him, was, that he had been seen speaking with a tall old man in the gate-way; and that,

shortly after, he had ordered his horse and ridden away.

The attempts to recall Lady Coldenham, to life, at length proved successful ; but, as she was in no state to continue the conversation, the party separated, Robert Woodhall promising to visit his noble relation on the following day.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE Court was assembled in the town of Dorchester ; and the notorious Jeffreys, with his gross, ferocious face, took his seat upon the bench. Several trials for treason were entered into in the morning, and despatched with terrible rapidity. Death, death, death, was the news brought to the prison every hour ! And each man awaited his doom as his character permitted.

The Court was crowded to suffocation ; and most of the magistrates of the county were assembled near the bench. Several clergy.

men were amongst their worships ; but one, in particular, seemed much interested in the course of the proceedings. He was a stout, tall, portly man of middle age, with bright, twinkling eyes, and a smooth, rosy countenance. He moved frequently on his seat, often looked towards the dock and the jury, and sometimes cast his eye, with an inquisitive glance, at the paper of notes which lay before the Judge, from whom he was not very far distant.

At length, the case of Ralph Woodhall was called on ; and, before the prisoner was brought into the dock, the clergyman whom I have mentioned, approached the judge, with a paper in his hand, and was seen to whisper to him. Jeffreys turned round, bent his beetle brows upon him, and surveyed him from head to foot.

“ I thought it was some Presbyterian knave,” he said, aloud, “ and not a clergyman of the Establishment. What do you

come here for, sirrah ? Like a straw-witness, to bring off the guilty ?”

“No, faith, my Lord,” replied Doctor Mac Feely, with a laugh, and perfectly undismayed by the menacing aspect of the Judge ; “I came according to my duty as a magistrate ; and, moreover, to get your advice about this little bit of a paper ; and, perhaps, to drink a bottle with you—or maybe two—after you have done the hanging and quartering, if you should be good-humoured enough to ask me to dinner. We have drank a bottle together before now at the Mitre, when you were a little man and I not much bigger. I paid for it, too, by the same token.”

“But what am I to do with this paper ? It’s not evidence, knave,” thundered Jeffreys, unable to restrain himself under the half-suppressed merriment of the Court. “Is the witness forthcoming ? Is he dead ? Is he buried ?—Is he gone to the devil by your ghostly counsels ? It is not evidence, sir.—Take it away, and yourself too, for



fear I have the gown stripped off your back. You shall not long disgrace the bench."

"Faith, my lord, if I do, I shall not be the only one," replied Doctor Mac Feely, walking away. But before he had taken many steps, pushing a path through his fellow magistrates, Jeffreys recollected himself a little, and called out aloud,

"Here, fellow—you parson! Give me the paper—let me look at it."

Doctor Mac Feely seemed to be suddenly stricken with a fit of deafness, and walked on deliberately; but those whom he was passing, at the moment, heard him say, as if to himself, "Don't I know better?—He's just in a humour to tear everything to pieces. Why not this? No, no; I know what I will do." And getting down into the court below, he forced his way to a spot just behind Mr. Danes, and spoke to him in a whisper, over his shoulders. Mr. Danes, in turn, whispered to an elderly counsellor before him, who

moved round his grave, hard-lined face, and said—

“Good! we will use it in some way, if need be. The very tendering will have its effect upon the jury.”

Doctor Mac Feely remained standing where he was, during the whole of the events which succeeded, although his fat sides suffered severely from the pressure of the crowd.

The little incident of the sparring between the parson and the Judge, had withdrawn the attention of the spectators from the dock ; and, when heads and eyes were bent in that direction, Ralph Woodhall was seen standing between two jailers.

Every one knows the impression produced by a fine person and a dignified bearing, even upon a court of justice ; and as the prisoner stood there, his handsome face, athletic form, and calm, resolute demeanour, had no slight influence in his favour. He fixed his eyes for a

moment or two on the Judge, and then let them run round the court. No loved face was there to greet him—no look of encouragement for his support—nothing but a sea of unknown, indifferent countenances, gazing at him as an object of curiosity.

Some forms were gone through, and then at once the counsel for the prisoner rose. Jeffreys would fain have refused to listen to him at that stage of the proceedings ; but he insisted, and the harsh Judge knew his man too well—his firmness—his quiet, persevering courage, and his profound knowledge of law—to resist too far. Being permitted to speak, he at once took an objection to the competence of the Court. He pointed out that the venue had not been changed, and that the case ought to be tried in Norfolk. It required but little argument to show that the law of the land was entirely on his side ; and that argument was placed in the plainest and briefest form.

Jeffreys was furious. He looked over his desk to a little man sitting near his feet, and asked him a question. The reply was in a very low and humble tone ; but it stirred up the wrath of the Judge still higher : his face became actually purple, and he poured forth upon the poor man's head a torrent of invectives, of which the words "Nay, villain !" and "Pitiful impostor !" were the lightest ornaments. A vast string of very blasphemous oaths was added ; and then, having thus vented his first fury, he consulted for a few moments with the Counsel for the Crown, whom he beckoned up ; then, raising his great, coarse voice, as if addressing the whole court, he said :

"Look you here, now!—see what law is, and how carefully it protects the subject. There stands a murderer—a man who should not be allowed to cumber the face of earth an hour longer than needful—a bad fellow—always a bad fellow from his cradle ; and yet some of the officers of

the crown—drunken knaves, I warrant—having neglected, or, perhaps, been bribed to neglect, their duty, in a matter of mere form—a thing of no moment—this fellow thinks that he will protract his life for some miserable months to come. He must be a cowardly villain to wish to live on in a prison.”

“I wish a fair trial before a just Judge,” interrupted Ralph, in a firm, loud tone, which startled even Jeffreys.

“Hold your tongue, knave!” vociferated the Judge. “We will fit you. You shall be disappointed of your fine project: you may gain a few hours, but no more.—You shall be hanged before I quit Dorchester, if I live. See here, now, what a fellow this is! There are no less than three charges against this man. One for murder—cold-blooded, premeditated murder; another under the statute regarding conformity; and a third for high treason. The indictment is ready; but he must have a copy, and time to read it. Oh, yes! he

shall have a copy ; but we will fit him.” Then, leaning forward a little, he looked full at Ralph’s counsel, and added, bitterly, “ You have gained so much for your man, sir, and you shall not say that I overstepped the law. Oh no, sir, you may strive to withdraw him from justice ; but you shan’t succeed.”

“ You mistake, my Lord,” replied the counsel ; “ I have no intention of charging you with overstepping the law, and still more do you mistake in supposing that I wished to withdraw this honourable and noble-minded young man from fair trial and justice. Had I done so, I should have taken another course. As the venue is laid in Dorsetshire, and the indictment, on its very face, alleges the crime charged to have been committed in Norfolk, I should have suffered the trial to proceed to a verdict, and pointed out the flaw in the indictment afterwards ; but, in consultation with this honourable and very high-spirited gentleman last night, I agreed, at his suggestion,

to raise the objection at once, in order to show that he shrunk not from a fair trial, but only claimed the same rights as any other British subject."

"Silence, sir, silence! Sit down this instant!" roared Jeffreys. "Jailer, remove the prisoner, and keep him in safe custody. —Call on another."

Several persons left the Court from the outskirts of the crowd; and Doctor Mac Feely elbowed his way forth with difficulty, taking the paper he had brought in his pocket.

Tidings of what had occurred spread to various houses in the vicinity, to the great inn, and to the temporary dwelling of Hortensia Danvers. Various were the feelings which the intelligence that Ralph Woodhall's trial for murder had been put off, on account of an error in the indictment, excited in the bosoms of the many persons interested. With those, however, to whom it gave the greatest satisfaction, it had at first produced tears.

Lord Woodhall received the news with stern bitterness, and said little, but remained gloomy, dark, and silent, till Robert Woodhall joined him with a very cheerful face.

“Well, what think you of this?” asked the old lord. “You seem gay, young man.”

“Because everything is going well, my lord,” replied Robert Woodhall. “We have ten times the chance of getting a verdict against him, as things stand at present, upon the charge of high treason, than we should have upon the charge of murder. Armitage says that he would most certainly have been acquitted. Poor Henry’s letter would be quite sufficient. I told you how refractory the jury were, last night; and those who know them say, that at least five of them would have held out for acquittal, even if they had died of starvation. It not being a state-case, the jury was badly struck. But upon the charge of treason, Armitage says he is perfectly



certain ; for they are condemning everybody ; and when once they have got a taste for blood, they will go on."

"It vexes me," said the old lord, with a dissatisfied look. "He should be hanged for Henry's death and nothing else. A gross and culpable act of negligence has been committed ; and the clerk, or whoever else he is, should be discharged and punished."

"Counsellor Armitage declares that it is very well as it is," urged Robert, adding, with a laugh, "He vows that he saw the flaw, and would not notice it, because he knew we should fail of conviction ; but I don't believe he did see it, or ever looked at the indictment. The charge of treason, however, will succeed, depend upon it ; and if it should not, by any ill luck, we have still this left to go upon with a better chance of success."

Lord Woodhall, however, was still dissatisfied, and would not be convinced that it made no difference whether Ralph Woodhall was

condemned for another offence or for the murder of his son. He drew a distinction, which Robert Woodhall, only anxious to destroy one who stood in his way, and whom he hated, could not at all perceive.

Knowing how impossible it was to move Lord Woodhall in any opinion which he had once taken up, Robert at length left him ; but he did not even ask to see Margaret, for he knew, that little could be hoped from an interview at that moment.

## CHAPTER XII.

It was night when, in a large airy bedroom of the great inn where Lord Woodhall had taken, up his abode on his arrival in Dorchester, Hortensia and Margaret sat side by side, with faces pale from anxiety, and thoughts fixed intently upon one subject. The day had been occupied by Ralph's trial for high treason ; and, as both were well aware, Hortensia more especially, that Ralph had never had any share whatever in Monmouth's rebellion, they at first had looked upon the charge somewhat lightly, and en-

tertained but small doubts that, upon such an accusation, he would be acquitted.

As the day passed on, however, and messenger after messenger brought tidings from the court, their feelings became very different, and they were startled and astounded by the evidence which was produced. It was proved, by Hortensia's own servants, that Ralph had come to Danvers Newchurch during her absence ; that he had been found in her park in close communication with a notorious rebel, then actually levying war against the Crown—Thomas Dare ; that it was very shortly after this, that Dare appeared in Taunton, and raised the people of that town in favour of Monmouth ; and that Dare boasted publicly that he had assurances of Lady Danvers's tenantry joining the Duke. This was enough to shake Hortensia's confidence—to agitate—to terrify her.

Another messenger soon followed, bringing her the news that two of her servants had sworn to the fact of Ralph

having had a long private interview with Monmouth in her house during her absence, and that Mr. Drayton himself had sworn to the same. Then she heard that two more of her people had deposed that, on leaving Ralph at the door of her house, the Duke had turned to him, saying, "Remember my commission. I trust to you;" and that Ralph had replied, "I will not fail, your Grace."

Hortensia herself, though she easily conceived the words to be innocent, did not understand to what they could apply; and she saw that the chain which bound the victim was being drawn tighter and tighter around him. Then came the evidence of his having been on the road to Axminster when Monmouth was actually in combat with the royal troops; and then of his having been taken upon the very field of Sedgemoor. She knew that many a one had already been condemned upon testimony slighter than this; and her heart sank within her.

The summing of the Judge, too, was brought to her with tolerable accuracy ; and she perceived how skillfully he had pieced out the evidence against the unfortunate prisoner, not only indulging in violent abuse, but attributing to him much which none of the testimony warranted.

Ralph, in his defence, told the facts just as they had occurred, plainly and straightforwardly. He pointed out that the Duke of Monmouth had come to Danvers New-church with a considerable body of men, whom he had no power of opposing, even if he had been personally cognizant of their being in rebellion ; that the Duke had left with him a sealed letter for Lady Danvers, which he believed had come from the Baroness Wentworth, charging him to deliver it as soon as possible ; and that the words which had passed between them at the door referred solely to that.

At all this, Jeffreys scoffed in his summing up, declaring it to be a trumped-

up story which would not deceive an oyster-wench. It was clear, he contended—as clear as anything under the sun—that Ralph had held friendly communication with the rebel and his agents ; had agreed to assist him ; and had endeavoured to induce Lady Danvers to take part in the same criminal proceedings. Doubtless, he added, the young knave had entrapped her to go into Axminster for the purpose of entangling her with the insurrection, so that she could not draw back.

“ Either her Ladyship’s good sense, or her good fortune,” said Jeffreys, “ kept her out of the scrape ; but with that we have nothing to do at present. The case is against this young felon—felon in all senses of the word—guilty, beyond doubt, of a thousand different crimes.”

He then said that he left the case entirely in the hands of the jury, though he could not have any doubt as to the verdict they would bring in.

Poor Hortensia!—despair took posses-

sion of her, for a time at least. She did not fail to perceive how the evidence given might be brought to bear against herself; but to that she gave hardly a moment's thought: her whole mind was fixed upon the fate of Ralph; and, after pondering gloomily for a few minutes, she started up suddenly, saying,

“I will go and see Margaret, let the old man behave as he will.”

Calling her maid, she hastened away to the inn, where she now sits with poor Margaret, not alone, for the two maids are with them, standing at a little distance, and entering partially into the feelings of those whom they serve.

Old Lord Woodhall had gone forth, several hours before, to the Court of Justice; for his disappointment at the result of the first charge against Ralph, had only stimulated his eagerness; and he could not rest satisfied without watching the progress of events. When once there, the interest increased upon him. He was torn, it is



true, by various contending feelings. He could not see the gallant young man, whom he had loved only less than his own children in former years, stand there in the dock, defending his life with calm dignity and firmness, without experiencing emotions which he strove hard to crush. But when he thought of his own brave, high-spirited boy, and persuaded himself that that young man's hand had killed him, all his feelings of pity were turned to gall and bitterness. The interest was but the deeper, however, on account of this contention. He stayed out the examination of all the witnesses—he stayed out the prisoner's defence and the Judge's summing up; and now, with the greater part of the auditory, he was lingering still in the Court to hear the verdict of the jury, who had retired to deliberate.

The time was one of anxious suspense to all, but to none more terrible than to Margaret and Hortensia. From time to time they would send out a maid to en-

quire, or one of Lady Danvers's servants would put his head in, and say—

“No verdict yet, my Lady.”

Hortensia bore it all firmly, and apparently calmly, though her anxious look and pale cheek belied the tranquillity of her aspect. Poor Margaret could hardly bear up at all: often the tears would not be restrained; and the long protracted suspense kept her only under increasing agony.

At length, a noise of bustle and confusion was heard in the street, followed by a hasty step running up the stairs. A moment after, the door opened quickly, and Mr. Drayton himself appeared. His face was sufficient answer to all enquiries. It was pale, haggard, ghastly, and full of deep grief.

“Speak!” cried Hortensia. “Speak!”

“Condemned, madam,” replied the steward, solemnly; “and partly upon my testimony. But, indeed, I could not help it. I only told the truth.”

The words had just passed his lips, and Margaret's head had fallen forward on the table, with her eyes deluging her fair hands with tears, when Lord Woodhall entered the room with a slow and somewhat feeble step. He was a very much altered man. His eyes were fixed on the floor ; his look was grave and sad ; his whole aspect downcast and sorrowful.

Oh, how often does fruition bring strong passion to ashes and bitterness ! He was sated : the fierce desire of his heart was gratified : the man on whom he sought vengeance was condemned to a terrible death. The awful words rang in his ear : he saw the gallant youth standing firm and unshaken while they were uttered : he saw him wave his hand as he left the dock, and say, as calmly as if he had been going to his rest—

“Farewell all ! Remember, I die innocent—remember !”

Remorse and pity had touched the old man's heart. For the first time, he doubted

the guilt of the man he had persecuted ; and, as he sank into a chair, his first words were—

“ Poor Ralph ! ”

Margaret's ear caught those friendly sounds. Springing up, with a wild gesture of entreaty, she cast herself at her father's feet, exclaiming—

“ Oh, save him, save him ! ”

The old man shook his head, sorrowfully, and replied, in a very low tone—

“ It is in vain, my child ! I cannot even interfere to save the slayer of my son.”

“ Oh, he did not, he did not slay my brother,” cried Margaret, vehemently ; “ it is all false—a device of that traitor, Robert. Ralph would have died ere he injured Henry.”

“ You have been deluded, Lord Woodhall,” said Lady Danvers, wiping the tears from her eyes ; “ and, if the trial for murder had taken place, you would yourself have seen that your poor young kinsman is innocent. I can give testimony to the impossibility of his ever having drawn his

sword against your son ; for I know where he was, and can account for every moment of his time from nine o'clock of that fatal morning till after the deed was done. Lord Woodhall, if you have had any share in bringing about this condemnation, now exert yourself to the utmost to save this young man's life, or I will, ere two days are over, lay before you such evidence of his innocence as shall fill you with horror and remorse until the last day of your existence."

"Can you so?" asked the old man, gazing at her. "Is it so doubtful as that?"

"It is not doubtful in the least," replied Hortensia, almost sternly. "He did not do it. It was impossible for him to do it. Stay with him, Margaret; cease not to plead until you have wrung some promise from him. I have heard of the doings in this case, and know how much influence he has exerted, and can exert. I will away at once to another quarter, and see what can be

done there. When I return, I will bring with me those who can show your father where Ralph Woodhall spent every moment of his time, that he did not pass with me, on the day of your brother's death. These witnesses are now in the town, though they would have come too late had he been tried three days ago."

Thus saying, she hurried away, followed by her maid; and, on the stairs, passed Robert Woodhall with a look of contempt and horror which she could not hide.

The young man doffed his hat, and smiled one of those meaning, serpent looks which often accompanied with him a sense of triumphant cunning. He walked on to the room in which Margaret and her father had been left together, but merely opened the door and looked in; then, seeing her at her father's feet, he bowed his head slowly to Lord Woodhall, and retired.

The sight of him made the old man start, and he gazed round vacantly, for a moment, as if looking for something. It

was for some resource he looked ; for his mind was greatly troubled. At length, a sudden scheme seemed to strike him, and he grasped his daughter's hands in his.

"Margaret, my child, Margaret," he cried, "you can save all—him—me—all of us, if you will. I have promised your hand to your cousin Robert. I have pledged him my honour and my faith. I have imprecated the curse of Heaven upon my head if I do not keep my word. Now, Margaret, now, give your consent—promise to be Robert's—and I will do my best to save this young man."

Margaret started up, and gazed upon her father silently with a look of icy horror. "Oh God!" she exclaimed at length, "what is it my father imposes on me?"

Then she raised her hand to her brow and pressed it tightly, as if to still the throbbing of her brain.

"You will do your best to save him?" she asked, gazing wildly in the old man's face.

“*I will* save him. He *shall* be saved,” exclaimed Lord Woodhall, vehemently. “If not, your promise shall be void. Do you consent, Margaret?—Consent, my child—consent. Your old father beseeches and intreats his child to save him from dishonour and remorse, and this young man from death.”

Margaret clasped her hands together, and raised her eyes on high, as if praying to Heaven for help. Then she placed her right hand in her father’s, and said, in a low, sad, solemn tone, but with every word marked and distinct, “On that condition I *do* consent.—But give me time—you must give me time!” And she added, in a lower tone, “To die!”

“You shall have time, ample time. Thanks, thanks, my dear child,” exclaimed Lord Woodhall, kissing her. But when he withdrew his arms, Margaret fell senseless on the floor.

The maid, who had been in the room during the whole scene, ran hastily to her



mistress's aid, and poor Margaret was removed to her own chamber, still in a state from which it was cruelty to rouse her.

“Send for a doctor! Bring her to herself!” ejaculated the old Lord. “I will away as speedily as possible, and see the Judge. He has blank pardons in his pocket, they say, ready signed, which he tosses around among boon companions in a drinking bout. I must find him forthwith; though doubtless he is now at his revels.—Tell her where I am gone. That will please her.”

Thus saying, he sped away; and when Lady Danvers returned, about three quarters of an hour after, with a young man and an elderly woman, she found the room vacant. Enquiring farther, and leaving her two companions behind her, she sought out Margaret's chamber. The fair girl was lying on her bed, as pale as ashes, and with her eyes closed; but Hortensia could see, by a tear which trickled under the lids and gemmed the long dark lashes, that she

had been recalled to sense and suffering.

Her maid was now with her alone. Making a sign to Lady Danvers not to speak aloud, she advanced, and said, in a whisper, that her mistress was better, but that the least effort made her fall into a fainting-fit again. In the same tone she communicated to Hortensia all that had occurred.

“Poor girl!” said Hortensia, clasping her hands together, “what hast thou done? They have been very cruel to thee. Thou hast saved him thou lovest, I trust ; but at the expense of peace and happiness, and, perhaps, life.”

It is probable that Margaret heard the murmur of her voice ; but she stirred not in the least, and Hortensia quitted the room in deep sadness.

## CHAPTER XIII.

A large table was set in a rich and costly room, and round it were seated a number of persons, very dignified in station, but certainly not, at that moment, very dignified in demeanour. At the head of the table was an elderly gentleman, well fattened and of rubicund face, which had evidently lost none of its roses by the accessories of the meal. This was Mr. Mayor, entertaining the Judges at supper. On his right hand sat Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys, with his wig a good deal on one side, a curious sort of tightness about one corner of his mouth, and a depression of

the other corner, as if he had been slightly affected by palsy. A merry leer was in his eyes, however, and a robust jollity about his whole appearance, which contrasted strangely with his savage and ferocious look upon the bench. Yes, it did afford a strange contrast ; but it was nothing compared with the harsh, jarring discord of his light, licentious levity at the table, when closely opposed to the extravagant cruelty of his language in the morning. There he was, laughing and drinking, and jesting and singing, immediately after having condemned half-a-score of innocent men to death.

Judges, like undertakers, I believe, get hardened to the idea of death.

“How many are you going to pardon, my lord ?” asked the worthy Mayor, with a half-suppressed hiccough.

“That depends upon their circumstances, Master Mayor,” replied Jeffreys, with a broad laugh.

“That young man, I hope,” observed

the good-natured magistrate : “ I mean the Mr. Woodhall who was convicted of seeing Monmouth before the rebellion broke out. His case was not half as bad as the rest, and he seemed a fine young fellow.”

“ His case will be worse before Saturday night,” returned Jeffreys. “ A knave—an arrant knave, sir. Why, they tell me his father is not worth five hundred a year. Was there ever such a knave ? By God’s wounds ! the son of such a knave ought to hang for having such a father, and the father ought to be hung for having such a son.—Ha ! what is this ? Say I am supping : I will not be disturbed. I have done work enough for one day, and cut out work enough for a few others.”

“ The lady says she must and will see you, my Lord,” replied the servant to whom his last words were addressed, and who, the moment before, had slipped a note into his hand.

“ Ha, ha ! a lady !” exclaimed Jeffreys, with a leer round the table. “ We must see the

lady. Is she young, fellow? Is she pretty?"

"Quite beautiful, sir," replied the man; "and such a dress!"

"'Twill do—'twill do!" cried the Judge. "Show her into a private room—quite private; and I will come to her anon.—I must steady myself, gentlemen—I must steady myself. I'll even drink a cup of water. That is the most steadying thing I know."

After a moment's thought, Jeffreys rose, and walked out of the room coolly and straightly enough; for it required an infinite quantity of strong drink to produce anything more in him than a sort of boisterous merriment, in which he strangely forgot all dignity and propriety.

As the reader has probably by this time supposed, the person whom he found waiting for him was Lady Danvers. She was accompanied by her maid, however, and two of her men were stationed at the door of the room.

“My Lord,” she said, as soon as he entered, “I am glad to see you. You have condemned my friend, Mr. Ralph Woodhall, this day : I come to intercede for him.”

“All in vain, my Lady—all in vain!” returned Jeffreys, glancing his eye at the maid-servant. “Found guilty by a jury, he can expect no mercy.”

Hortensia had spoken very calmly ; for she knew the man too well to let him see any agitation.

“Why not?” she asked, in the same quiet tone. “If his guilt were proved, (which you, my Lord, know quite well it is not, and which I deny) still he would be very much less culpable than any of the others whom you have condemned. You must, and of course will, pardon some, in compassion to the executioner. Is it not right, then, to choose the least guilty ?—Alice, go to the door and stay with the two men. Shut the door, remember.”

Jeffreys grinned ; for he saw that Lady Danvers was now coming to the point.

“ I do not mean to say,” he answered, “ that this young man’s guilt is quite as atrocious as that of some others ; but—”

“ The levying of a severe fine,” interposed Hortensia, “ will meet the justice of the case better than execution.”

“ That may be, madam,” returned Jeffreys, “ but the law says—Death.”

“ One is bound and justified to evade the law in the cause of mercy, where law is too severe,” pursued Hortensia. “ My Lord, I understand you have received from the King, with a view to such cases as these, a number of pardons signed in blank, in order to prevent a waste of time in referring to him. Now, I can see, by what you admit, that you judge this young man is worthy of one of these pardons ; and the only question is, what is the fine you think sufficient. If the strict letter of the law prevent you from commuting the sentence openly to a fine, the money can be paid



quite privately, justice be satisfied, and yet no deviation from the law appear."

"Madam, they should send you ambassador to the hardest-headed court in Europe," said Jeffreys, with a laugh. "The worst feature, however, of this case is, that the young man is too poor to pay a fine. There is nothing to levy upon."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," replied Hortensia; "there are the purses of his friends; and, let me tell you, my Lord, he has many not only rich, but powerful, friends. The Duke of Norfolk crossed the whole country, four days ago, to give evidence on the trial for murder, and remained in Dorchester till that part of the matter was settled."

"Ay, that's the worst of the whole business," said Jeffreys. "Were it not for that, we might content ourselves with laying a fine of ten or twenty thousand pounds."

"Nay, nay," urged Hortensia; "say five."

“Ten, at the least,” said the Judge, “ten, at the least.” And he shook his head decidedly.

“Well, ten be it,” replied the lady. “Do we understand each other?”

“Not quite,” returned Jeffreys; “for what’s the use of saving his head from treason, if it is to be touched for murder? Besides, it’s only fair to tell you, putting all round-about aside, that the King will have Lord Woodhall satisfied in this matter. His son has been killed in a duel of a very irregular kind, and the old man is furious!”

“Not so furious as he was,” answered Hortensia. “His son has been killed; but not by Ralph Woodhall. The case would have failed against him, my Lord; for there is evidence in this town to show that it was impossible he could have been upon the spot where the duel took place, for at least two hours after the occurrence.”

“Ay, I thought there was something of

that sort at the bottom of it," said Jeffreys. "But what then? He will have to be tried for that, and these things are uncertain, my lady."

"If such evidence is laid before Lord Woodhall as to make him see clearly that this gentleman is innocent, and he desires to desist from the prosecution, and even joins in our application for pardon in this other case—and if the same evidence convinces the Attorney-general that there is really no case to go to a jury, is there not some means—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Jeffreys. "Mr. Attorney can enter a *nolle prosequi* at any stage of the proceedings. But do you think the old lord will really sue for his pardon? I saw him last night, and he was as fierce as ever."

"He did not know anything of what he now knows, or will know in a few hours," replied Hortensia. "His heart is already melted; and if it is clearly proved to him that Ralph is, in truth, innocent, he himself

will be the first to apply to the Crown for a pardon."

A change came over Jeffreys's face, and he muttered between his teeth,

"We must stop that — that would never do."

Hortensia saw how her words affected him, and she hastened to take advantage of the impression. Leaning a little forward, she spoke a few words to Jeffreys in a whisper, to which he replied in the same tone. Then she put some question to him again ; and he answered aloud,

"Oh ! to my man, Silas Jones : he was once a Presbyterian knave, but I have converted him into an honest churchman : he dare not finger anything that belongs to me ; so pay it to him."

"And he will have the pardon ready ?" said Hortensia.

"Ay, ay," answered the Judge ; "by half past nine of the morning. But remember, my Lady, I must have Lord Woodhall's approval."

“That shall be secured,” responded Hortensia ; for she had good hope that, even if the old lord remained obdurate, the Judge having been brought thus far, might, by the same means, be brought one step farther. “Farewell, my good Lord,” she added, when about to retire. But Jeffreys extended his hand, saying,

“Let me kiss that lovely hand, divine Lady Danvers.”

She repressed an inclination to shudder, and gave him her hand, over which he bent his head with a look of maudlin admiration.

“That is a lovely ring,” said Jeffreys, pointing to a remarkably large diamond which she wore upon her middle finger. Hortensia immediately took it off, and presented it to him, saying,

“Take it, my Lord, and wear it in remembrance of this interview, in which you have been induced to shew mercy ; and whenever you look upon it, let the remembrance produce the same result.”

Jeffreys took it reverently, and placed it on his fat little finger ; but I very much fear that it never reminded him of mercy with any result.

When Hortensia was gone, he returned to the table, and, sitting down by the Mayor, soon turned the conversation with the good-natured magistrate to the subject of Ralph Woodhall. I must pass over all the jests that took place in regard to his interview with a lady, and the allusions to the diamond-ring upon his finger, which he rather encouraged than otherwise. Mr. Mayor again urged his remonstrances in regard to Ralph Woodhall, saying,

“ I do really, my Lord, wish you would think of that case.”

“ Well, well, I will,” replied Jeffreys, “ at your request, Mr. Mayor ; but if you get me to take compassion upon him, your worship will be the first Mayor that ever moved George Jeffreys.”

“ Had you not better respite him, my Lord ?” asked the Mayor.

“ Ay, that can be done to-morrow,” responded Jeffreys, “ according as I determine. It won’t do him any harm to have one night of hanging, drawing, and quartering. My life for it, he’ll be seeing his bowels in the hands of the hangman all night long. But I’ll think of it, I’ll think of it, Mr. Mayor, for your sake. Now, another glass, if you please, and that shall be the last, upon my honour—the last but four. Armitage, you dog, you are as dull as a swine to-night. There’s a pardon for you for that fat Presbyterian knave whom you convicted this morning of buying arms to supply the rebels. The fellow is an armorer by trade ; but that makes no difference : he had no business to buy arms when there was rebellion in the land. He’s rich, man, he’s rich ; and, if you understand coining, you may knock him into five hundred or a thousand gold pieces, with the effigy of his blessed Majesty upon them.”

The servant again came in and whispered something over the back of the Lord Chief Justice's chair.

"Who—who?" exclaimed Jeffreys, with a scowl.

"Lord Woodhall, my Lord," replied the servant, aloud.

"Oh, ask him in by all means," said the Mayor.

"On no account whatever," interrupted Jeffreys, rising at once. "This is private business—and, I fear me much, it is to move me against your request concerning that young man, Ralph. God help me!—how we poor sinners are torn to pieces by opposite applications!"

"Attend to mercy, my Lord—attend to mercy," ejaculated the Mayor.

But the Judge was half way down the room by that time.

Jeffreys was learned in the art in which statesmen of our own day are not unlearned, of making one favour serve three or four



applicants. When Lord Woodhall, therefore, urged his request that Ralph might be pardoned, Jeffreys made innumerable difficulties, and seemed, at length, to yield only at the old nobleman's most pressing entreaties. He insisted, at the same time, that Lord Woodhall should undertake to express to the Attorney-general his full conviction that Ralph had no share in causing the death of his son, and request that he would enter a *nolle prosequi* when the case came again for trial.

"There would be no pretence for pardoning him in this case," said Jeffreys, "if we were to have another trial next day and hang him for murder. Waste of parchment, my Lord—waste of parchment."

Lord Woodhall agreed to all that he demanded, and obtained in return a respite for Ralph before he left this admirable Lord Chief Justice. He went away with a heart wonderfully eased. Four-and-twenty hours before, he could not have imagined that he should have felt anything like satisfaction

at saving the life of Ralph Woodhall ; but now his feelings had taken a very different turn.

“Everybody says he did not do it,” he thought. “The Duke of Norfolk says it was impossible. The Lady Danvers, too ; and the parson—all of them. I do not want to wrong an innocent man, but I will find out the murderer yet, and have vengeance upon him. Well, well. If Ralph is innocent—and I begin to fancy that it may be so—he’ll marry Lady Danvers, and Margaret will marry Robert, and we should all be happy again—but for the want of Henry.”

Poor old man ! how completely he had forgotten, or how little must he have known, the feelings and passions of youth ! The indifference of old age to those things of the heart which make the brightness of active existence, is one of age’s greatest evils, considered as a stage of mere mortal life, but is, perhaps, a good prepara-

tion for parting with mortal things, to enter upon life eternal.

Thus musing, as I have shewn, Lord Woodhall approached the door of the inn, over which a great lantern was burning ; but, when his foot was on the step, a man came out and was passing, but suddenly stopped, gazed at him, and exclaimed,

“ Ah ! persecutor of my unhappy boy, is that you ? ”

“ Hush, man, hush ! ” cried Lord Woodhall, grasping old Mr. Woodhall’s hand. “ I have been in error—you are in error now. I am not persecuting your son : I have a respite for him in my pocket, and the promise of a pardon.”

Old Mr. Woodhall staggered back, and would have fallen, but one of Lord Woodhall’s servants caught him and took him into the inn. An agitating scene followed ; and Lord Woodhall, who was by nature a good-hearted and kindly man, rejoiced greatly that the life of his own cousin’s son was not to be sacrificed.

A short time passed in rambling questions and answers ; and, at length, Mr. Woodhall rose to go, saying—

“I must see him, my Lord, I must see him at once ; for he must think that his father has forgotten him and left him to his fate. I was detained upon the road by accident. But now, my Lord, I may carry him good news. Is it not so ?”

“You may assure him that he is safe,” said the old nobleman. “Here, take the respite with you, man. That will be the best comfort you can give the boy.”

And, taking it from his pocket, he put it in Mr. Woodhall's hands.

Engaging one of the horse-boys of the inn to guide him through the streets of a strange town, Ralph Woodhall's father found his way to the jail, and rang the great bell which hung at the gates. A moment after, a little panel, just large enough to frame a man's head, was drawn

back, and the face of a jailer appeared behind an iron grating.

“What do you want?” said the man.

Mr. Woodhall explained his business, and demanded to see his son. A rude and abrupt refusal was his only answer. He insisted and demanded, at all events, to see the Governor of the prison. The jailer, however, said, sullenly, that the Governor was absent, that the visitor was behind the hours, and that he should not have admission.

Mr. Woodhall then tried money ; but, strange to say, even this proved in vain. The man refused it, with real or affected indignation, and seemed about to close the wicket, when Ralph’s father announced that he had a respite with him for the prisoner.

“Then hand it in here,” said the jailer. “I suppose this means that he will be pardoned.”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Mr. Woodhall ; “therefore there can be no objection to my seeing him.”

"I won't break through the rules for any one," said the jailer, doggedly. "The jail is crammed full, and our orders are strict."

Sad and disappointed, Mr. Woodhall handed in the respite, calling up the boy who had accompanied him to witness its delivery, and desiring the jailer to announce the good tidings he bore at once to his son. The man promised to do so; but the moment he had retired into his lodge near the gate, he threw the paper upon a shelf with a laugh, saying, "Well, lay thou there. Thou shan't stop me getting my fifty pound. Devil take the Judges! They won't let a poor man earn anything. They pocket it all themselves. I wonder how much this cost. A great deal more than I get, I dare say."

His words may seem somewhat mysterious without explanation, which can only be given by entering one of the prison-cells, and displaying what had been passing there, about half an hour before.

Ralph Woodhall was sitting alone, an hour after the Judge had passed sentence upon him, with his limbs heavily fettered, and a still heavier weight upon his heart. Strong resolution had borne him up through the terrible scenes which had lately passed ; but all the bitterness of parting with life, at the very period of early joy, had been tasted at that last solitary hour. Suddenly the door opened, and a turnkey came in. He carried in his hand a small instrument, and, closing the door carefully behind him, he put it in Ralph's hands, saying, in a low tone, and pointing to the fetters, " Work away, and get them off. Leave them and the saw behind you."

Ralph gazed at him with astonishment, saying, " What do you mean ?"

" Haven't I told you ?" said the turnkey. " Hark ye ! At one in the morning, be dressed and ready. However hard I lock that door just now, you will find it open then. Walk out. Turn to the right along

the passage. You will come to a door. It will be open too. You will find a man beyond it, who won't see you. Don't you see him. Walk straight on till you find another man, who'll go on before you. Follow him as far as he goes. There you will find a horse and your people; and when they've paid the other two hundred, you can ride away."

He waited for no reply; but, turning away from the prisoner, quitted the cell, taking more than ordinary care in locking the door behind him, and making a good deal of noise about it.

On the following day, at about ten minutes before ten o'clock, when a good deal of bustle and excitement was visible in the prison, in consequence of the preparations for bringing the prisoners for trial rapidly into the court, the Deputy Sheriff presented himself at the gate, and demanded to see Mr. Ralph Woodhall, announcing, with an important air that a free pardon under the broad seal had been



received by the High Sheriff, and was then in his possession.

“Quick work, Master Deputy,” said the turnkey who was standing beside the porter. “Condemned yesterday at seven, sentenced at nine, and pardoned this morning before ten. But come along. You’ll like to give him the news yourself, I dare say ; for you may get something for your pains. He doesn’t want the stuff, and has paid well enough, considering. We haven’t been in this morning yet ; for he said he’d like to sleep till twelve, seeing he’d a hard day’s work of it yesterday.”

Thus saying, he led him away along the passages of the prison to one of the condemned cells. When he put the key in the door, however, it would not turn ; and he exclaimed, with a great oath, “ Why, it’s unlocked ! ”

So it proved, and the cell empty.

Nothing could exceed the horror and consternation expressed by the turnkey. He called the watchman who sat in the

passage, and insinuated that he had unlocked the door, and let the prisoner escape. The watchman repelled the charge with every appearance of indignation ; asked how he could unlock the door when he hadn't the key ; and vowed he hadn't left the passage a minute except when he went to call the doctor for John Philips, who had fallen into a fit, and was screaming like a madman.

“ Ay, he must have got out just then,” said the turnkey. “ How he picked the lock, I don't know. I locked it fast enough last night, I'm sure.”

“ I saw and heard you,” asseverated the watchman.

“ He's been well supplied from outside,” said the turnkey, pointing to the fetters which lay upon the floor of the cell. “ You see he has filed the irons right through.”

The Sheriff's Deputy was not altogether satisfied, however ; the Governor was called, a search was instituted, and a rope-

ladder was found, thrown over the wall of the prison-yard.

As a pardon, however, had been received, the Governor wisely thought that the less said about the matter the better ; and the Sheriff's Deputy, who was his friend, agreed to take the same view of the case. Their plans were somewhat deranged, indeed, by the arrival of old Mr. Woodhall in the midst of their consultations ; but, with great presence of mind, the Deputy-Sheriff asserted boldly that the prisoner he enquired for had been set free upon pardon, and had departed more than an hour ago.

## CHAPTER XIV.

ON the night after Ralph Woodhall's trial for treason, and at the end of a lane which at that time ran at the back of Dorchester jail, stood a man, holding the bridles of two horses over his arm. From time to time, he looked forward towards the prison, but more frequently kept his eyes fixed on the ground. At length, his sharp ear caught the sound of steps; and, shortly after, the figures of two men, appeared faintly, advancing at a quick pace. The watcher did not move from the spot, but put his hand upon

the hilt of his sword, and ascertained that it moved easily in the scabbard.

The two men he had seen, came forward quickly ; and, when quite close, one of them said, in an enquiring tone, "Stilling ?"

"The same, sir," replied the man. "Here, fellow," added he, addressing the second person, "here is the other two hundred pound for you. Look at it, and count it if you will."

The third man took a bag which was held out to him, withdrew the shade of a dark lantern, and by its light examined what he had received. He soon saw that the contents of the bag were gold ; and, after weighing it in his hand, seemed to be satisfied that the amount must be about right.

"I dare say it's all fair," he said ; "but I cannot stop to count it. Good night, sir, and good speed to you. You will be far enough by this time to-morrow, I hope."

"That he will," answered Stilling ; and, drawing one of the horses forward, while

the jailer closed his dark lantern and hurried rapidly away, he continued—"Let us mount and be gone, sir. We ought to be ten leagues at sea before day-break."

Ralph sprang upon the horse's back, and, in a few moments, he and Gaunt Stilling were riding away from Dorchester at full speed.

The latter led the way, and very little was said by either for rather more than an hour and a half, when Stilling turned to his master, saying—

"We are beyond pursuit, I think, sir. Twenty minutes more will bring us to the boat's side. All is ready and arranged, and they only wait for us, to put off."

"I have much to thank you for, Stilling," returned his master; "but you must have had assistance from others. Who has furnished you with the means to bribe these men?"

"Faith, no one furnished me with anything for that purpose," replied Stilling; "but the steward of Lady Danvers gave me five hundred pounds to make all

smooth at Bridgewater, when we were going there. I had no scruple in using it now, as I knew she would wish it used so ; I paid these knaves three hundred and fifty pounds to let you out, and hired a good lugger for another hundred."

New questions and answers succeeded, and Ralph found that the cause of Stilling's never having returned to the farm-house at the edge of Sedgemoor, when sent to obtain information, was very simple. He had fallen in with some men of the Tangier regiment, and had been carried to the quarters of Colonel Kirke. That worthy officer had thought fit to detain him, strongly suspecting that he had some design of joining the forces of Monmouth.

"I do not mean to say," continued Stilling, "that I had not a strong inclination to do so ; for there was one good stroke I would fain have given in that battle. However, Kirke could prove nothing against me, except that I had made my way straight to the quarters of the King's army,

which didn't suit his purpose ; otherwise, he would have had as much pleasure in hanging his old comrade, as in butchering any of the poor rebels. He was forced, in the end, to let me go ; and the first thing I heard was that you were in Dorchester jail. I took what measures I thought necessary regarding the first charge against you ; but I was quite unprepared for the second ; and marvellous well they got it up : so I had nothing for it but to do my best to get you out after condemnation, which, knowing well all the people here in Dorchester, was no very difficult matter."

Less than another half an hour brought the two horsemen to the sea-shore, at a spot where the coast was low and sandy ; and, after riding along for some way, they came upon a small group of fishermen's houses, where lights were still to be seen, and several persons were moving about. At some little distance from the shore, was a large lug-sail boat of some forty or fifty tons burden ; and Ralph and his companion



were instantly accosted by one or two of the fishermen, who urged them to hurry their movements, as the tide was going out.

Neither was inclined to make any long delay. Ralph sprang to the ground at once ; Stilling gave the horses to one of the men, with injunctions to do with them as he had been directed before ; and, both entering a little rowing boat which lay at the beach, they were pushed off by two of the fishermen who accompanied them, and were soon safely on board the lugger. A favourable breeze was blowing ; the large, heavy sails were soon filled ; and away the boat went, bounding over the waves, and directing her course right towards the coast of France.

It might, perhaps, render the narrative more interesting if I could recall any hair-breadth escapes or marvellous passages in the voyage ; but, alas ! there were none such to chronicle. The wind was perfectly fair ; the water slightly agitated,

but not stormy : no King's vessels appeared, to give chase to the little craft ; and the only objects they saw, except sea and sky, till they reached the French coast, were several other large fishing-boats like their own, and, just about day-break, one man-of-war, in the far distance, with all sails set, and steering away from them. She looked like a phantom on the waters, with her hull below the line of vision, and her sails figured faintly on the distant sky.

Towards the close of the day, they reached a little French port. It would not be very interesting to the reader to hear all the minor difficulties that beset them in making their way to Holland, or how they overcame them. Suffice it, that they *were* overcome, and that Ralph and his companion crossed the frontier line in about a fortnight after they had quitted England.

They made their way as rapidly as possible to Amsterdam,—the Hague not being a place quite safe at that time for refugees from England.

Having passed all his early life at college, or in the provinces of England, Ralph Woodhall found only one person in Amsterdam with whom he had any acquaintance. This was a dry, melancholic young man, who had been at Cambridge with him for some time, but had abandoned the Church of England, and adopted the views of the most extreme Calvinists. He was kind in his own way, and Ralph was in need of kindness ; but the views of this fellow collegian were so different from his own, that no great companionship could exist between them, and, certainly, the young dissenter's conversation was not at all likely to lighten the load of care for any man.

Gaunt Stilling, on the contrary, found numerous acquaintances amongst the English who had taken refuge at Amsterdam. But both he and his master had too many dark and gloomy chambers in the palace of the breast, to admit many persons to their intimacy.

On his arrival at the Dutch capital,

Ralph Woodhall, it must be recollected, was in no degree aware that a pardon had been obtained for him in regard to the crime of high treason with which he had been charged : nor did he know that Lord Woodhall, satisfied with his innocence, had ceased to pursue him for the murder of his son. Condemned for one offence, which he had never committed—liable, as he thought, to be tried, the moment he returned, for another, of which he was equally innocent,—and, moreover, charged with a third, which was little less heinous in the eyes of the court than murder or treason,—he saw nothing before him but a long and hopeless exile, the loss of all bright prospects, and the vanishing of all his dreams of love.

At the same time, gnawing embarrassment preyed upon him. It may easily be supposed, that he carried no great sum of money with him. Almost all he had, had been expended in the prison ; the fifty pounds which remained in Gaunt Stilling's hands, from the money given by Lady

Danvers, had been nearly all expended ; and coming want stared him in the face. Many an anxious consultation did he hold with Stilling, as to what was to be done in the circumstances in which they were placed. But he obtained from his servant little comfort of a kind that could be at all available. Stilling's reply always was—

“ Oh, you will have money soon, sir, from England, and so shall I. I have taken care to let the people know where we are, and they won't leave us destitute. Your father will take care of you, and I have friends who will look out for me.”

“ But I cannot, and will not, bear to be a burden upon my father,” Ralph would rejoin. “ I must seek out some employment here in the service of the State—as a soldier, or in any other capacity for which I may be suited. Methinks I will go to the Hague and see the Prince of Orange. I can shew him that I have had no share in this mad insurrection of Monmouth, and can prove my innocence pretty well of all other crimes.

I have letters for several gentlemen at the Hague from the Duke of Norfolk; and doubtless they will use their influence to obtain for me some employment."

"Wait a little, sir, wait a little," was Gaunt Stilling's reply. "We shall hear something from England soon. There is news which must be sent to me, and that speedily. In that letter we shall most likely hear more of those in whom you take an interest."

He was not wrong in his anticipations. Ten days had hardly passed when several letters reached Amsterdam for Ralph, and two for Gaunt Stilling. Ralph's news was joyful on all points but one. The letters conveyed to him intelligence that a full pardon had been obtained for him on the charge of treason; that a *nolle prosequi* had been entered by the Attorney-General in regard to the charge for murder; and that Lord Woodhall was fully convinced, from evidence which had been laid before him, of his innocence of the death of Henry

Woodhall. But it seemed, from the tenor of all the letters, that the charge still hung over his head of having comforted and assisted a non-conformist clergyman and attended a dissenting conventicle, which might subject him, if he returned unadvisedly, to lengthened imprisonment.

Several passages in these letters were somewhat obscure ; for his father, by whom one was written, did not seem to be aware that he had made his escape without any knowledge of the pardon ; and Hortensia, who wrote to him likewise, though she appeared to have comprehended at once how his flight to Holland had been effected, alluded to the painful and unhappy circumstances in which he was placed, in terms which he thought hardly applicable to the mere chance of his being tried for a very inferior offence.

A third letter, which surprised him much, was from his cousin Lord Coldenham. It was written in a frank but not a cheerful vein, congratulating him upon his

escape from death, but urging him strongly to return to England immediately. It assigned no motives on the part of the young lord himself for pressing this point so strongly ; but the concluding words of the letter were : “For the sake of your own best interests, Ralph—for the sake of your dearest hopes—come, and come directly.”

The effect upon his mind of the intelligence he received, was to render him thoughtful, but not sad ; and he was still hesitating in some degree how he should act (for his father’s letter contained a remittance which enabled him to act freely,) when Gaunt Stilling joined him, with an expression of countenance which puzzled Ralph a good deal. His brow was contracted with a heavy frown ; but his eyes were bright and sparkling, and a quivering sort of eagerness was about his lip at every word he spoke, which betrayed no inconsiderable agitation within.



“ Well, sir, what news ?” he said, abruptly.

Ralph gave him a summary of the intelligence he had received, and the man laughed rather wildly, saying,

“ Is that all ? Better news than mine.”

“ I am sorry to hear you have bad tidings,” observed Ralph. “ I hope they are not of a very serious character ?”

“ Family matters, family matters,” answered Gaunt Stilling, walking twice up and down the room. “ The old man is ill, and well he may be : a bad complaint, sir—a broken heart.”

“ I have just been pondering,” said Ralph, “ whether it would be better or not for me to return to England at once. My cousin, Lord Coldenham, urges me strongly to do so ; and, if I do, we can go together.”

“ Let me go first, sir,” interposed Gaunt Stilling, quickly and eagerly. “ You shall soon hear more *from* me or *of* me—more

than all the rest have told you, I'll answer for it. As for myself, I *must* go, and this very day. See there what is written to me." And he put in Ralph's hand a letter containing the following few words :

"Come back instantly. You are wanted here at once for the great work which must at length be done. I have refrained too long. I will hesitate no longer.

"MORABER."

"This is strange," remarked Ralph, returning the letter.

"Not so strange as some tidings in *this* letter, sir," said Gaunt Stilling, striking lightly the other he held in his hand. "However, before I go, let me ask you one question, sir, which is of more importance than you may think : I am very bold, but you will pardon me. Are you to

be married, as men say, to Lady Danvers?"

"Not the most remote chance of it," replied Ralph. "Have you too, Stilling, been deceived by appearances, the deceitfulness of which none could judge better? Neither Lady Danvers nor myself ever dreamed of such a thing. She knows my heart too well, Stilling."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said Gaunt Stilling, warmly. "And now, good-bye."

"But is there such great haste?" asked Ralph. "I would fain have an hour or two's consideration as to whether I had better accompany you or not."

"Better stay where you are, sir," replied Stilling—"for the present, at least. I would not stop one hour after having received that letter for more than King James could give. I owe this man, sir, a deep debt of gratitude, which must be paid in whatever way he chooses."

"And I," added Ralph, "am deeply

your debtor, Stilling; and I would fain do something, however little is in my power."

"Never mind that, sir," said Stilling, slowly inclining his head, with a very significant gesture. "All debts *to* me and *from* me will soon be paid. Fare-you-well, sir! May God speed you better, when I have gone from you, than you have sped while I have been with you!"

And, without farther leave-taking, he turned, and quitted the room.

Something very remarkable was in his manner—a sort of sharp, wild, abruptness which, in all the variations of his mood, and they had been many, Ralph had never remarked before. He mused over the matter a moment or two; but we are too apt to look on the signs of suppressed passion in others as matters of no moment, not seeming to comprehend that, where emotion is so strong as to carry with it a sense of the necessity of concealing it, the temporary resistance with which it meets, only seems to concentrate its power,

and it bursts forth at length in act, because it was denied expression in words.

After thinking over the character and conduct of Gaunt Stilling for a few minutes in silence, Ralph dismissed the subject from his mind, and turned to other thoughts. He wrote to his father, to Hortensia, and to Margaret, though without much hope of finding an opportunity to forward the epistle to the latter in safety, and with secrecy. He wrote, too, to Lord Woodhall, repeating his assurance that he never had drawn his sword against his cousin Henry, and buoying himself up with flattering hopes that Margaret might still be his.

To Hortensia and to his father, he judged it necessary, from the ambiguous expressions in their letters, to give a detailed account of his escape as far as it could be done without committing any of the persons engaged in it, and assuring them both that he had never heard of the pardon till the morning on which he wrote. Lord Coldenham's

letter he reserved for farther consideration ; and a gleam of peaceful hope seemed to break upon him once more, after so many had passed away, overshadowed as soon as seen.

## CHAPTER XV.

ORMEBAR CASTLE presented a gay and festive scene, such as had not been beheld within its walls for several years. A number of the neighbouring nobility and gentry had been invited to pass a few days there in a sport already beginning to fall into disuse, although it had been revived for a short time by the favour of Charles the Second. A mews had long been attached to the Castle, and the hawks of Ornebar were famous throughout the country. The merry monarch himself had considered the present of a couple of pair of well-reclaimed birds of

that breed, a great gift; and a grand hawking party at Ormebar was sure to attract all that was gay and graceful in the county.

Two facts were remarked as strange, by the guests: namely, that the young Lord Coldenham was not present at the Castle, for which various unsatisfactory reasons were assigned; and that Margaret Woodhall, publicly announced as the affianced bride of her cousin Robert, though in the Castle with her father, and appearing occasionally at meal-times in the hall, shared not in any of the sports or amusements which were going on; and, when she was seen, came with pale cheek and sorrowful brow, self-involved in her own thoughts, and smiling not at the gayest jests or most pleasant amusements. She seemed to take no interest in anything. She hardly appeared to notice aught around her. She looked like a person walking in a dream, and that a sad one; and vain was every



effort to excite her attention, or to awaken her interest.

During several days, Lady Coldenham seemed to take no heed of this conduct : she let it pass as if it were undeserving a thought. But, at length, one day, as Margaret sat alone in her room, the imperious woman entered, and seated herself with an air of proud disdain.

"I come," she said, "to enquire what you mean, my pretty cousin, by your treatment of my son."

"*I*, madam!" exclaimed Margaret, gazing at her with a look of apprehension. "I have no particular meaning in my conduct."

"Then I wish you *would* have," replied Lady Coldenham, bitterly ; "and a very different meaning from that which every one puts upon your demeanour. I wish you would mean to please your promised husband ; to shew him some sort of courtesy, if not respect."

Margaret was roused.

"Respect !" echoed she. "What should I respect in Robert Woodhall ?"

"You should respect him, whom you have to marry," said Lady Coldenham. "You should respect the house from which he springs."

"My promise to marry him," replied Margaret, with cold calmness, "was cruelly wrung from me in a moment of the greatest agony. It is sufficient that I keep it, without other concessions being exacted from me. He cannot make me more than his slave. Knowing that I abhorred him, he persisted in a suit which he ought to have felt could only make me abhor him more, and obtained from my poor father, by what means I know not, a solemn promise that I should be his. He instigated my father to take advantage of the most terrible circumstances to obtain a pledge from me ; and now, Lady Coldenham, my father will redeem his vow. I will redeem my pledge. My hand shall be his—the estates, which he covets more than my hand, will

be his likewise—but ask nothing farther. My heart never can be his—my esteem, my respect, my love, he never can obtain.”

“Impudent girl!” exclaimed Lady Coldenham. “This to his mother?”

“Ay, to any one, to everyone, to all who question me on the subject,” answered Margaret. “I am no longer the timid child whom you once knew to quail at your presence, and to shrink from your proud eye. You and yours have taken from me all hope and all fear. You have strengthened me by misery. You have made life valueless, death a blessing to be coveted, and not far off, I trust. My father has brought me here, Lady Coldenham, against my will ; but I trust, at least, that the privacy of my own chamber will be allowed to me.”

“Good—mighty good!” cried Lady Coldenham, with a scornful laugh. “Now, mark me, Mistress Margaret Woodball. We will tame you a little. You seek, I know, to put off this marriage till the latest possible

hour ; but, as we find that kindness has no effect upon you, we will try sterner measures. We will not allow you to trifle with us. The marriage shall take place soon—immediately.”

“That will be as my father shall decide,” replied Margaret, in as calm a tone as before. “I have always held that a man doomed to die, shows himself a coward if he attempts to put off his execution for a moment. You have made me brave, Lady Coldenham. You cannot frighten me.”

“Ha, ha!” vociferated the old lady, rising with an air of triumph. “Lucky that no compulsion will be needed.”

And she paced majestically out of the room.

Well might she triumph ; for the object of her visit to Margaret was attained with less difficulty than she had expected. No opposition had been shown to a speedy marriage, and she hastened to Lord Woodhall to tell him that his daughter consented.

The old man could hardly believe his ears ; but the assurance of Lady Coldenham was strong, and she told him, with a slight gloss, what had passed between herself and Margaret.

Robert Woodhall came to her aid, seeming to understand his mother's schemes almost by intuition. Between them both, they soon obtained Lord Woodhall's consent, that a very early day should be fixed ; and preparations were immediately begun.

Margaret bore up well, when the public eye was upon her. She quailed not, she wavered not ; no tear was seen to dim her eyelids ; not a word of opposition did she utter. Her character seemed to be entirely changed. The frank, simple, timid girl, blooming in rich health, and agitated by manifold emotions, was now the cold, grave, firm, decided woman, pale as monumental marble, and unmoved by any of the passing things of life. A petrifying hand had touched her : that of Despair ; and she was indeed no longer the same.

Robert Woodhall saw it all—understood it all. But he had no pity : he rejoiced.

Margaret was now more alone than ever. She seldom, when she could avoid it, quitted her own room. She left to others all preparation, and only stipulated that the marriage should be performed by the good Irish clergyman, who so many years had been her father's chaplain—who had known her mother, and approved himself the friend of her childhood. She knew that he had faults ; but she knew, also, that he had many virtues. She thought that his familiar face would be a comfort and a support to her.

As Margaret was sitting alone one day in a little chamber communicating with her bed-room, while all the family and guests were absent on some gay occasion at Dorchester, her maid announced that Doctor Mac Feely had come to visit her.

“Bring him hither, bring him hither,” cried Margaret, with the first appearance of eagerness she had displayed for many a

day. "Here we shall not be interrupted, and I want much to speak with him."

In two minutes more, Doctor Mac Feely, with his portly person and buoyant step, swung into the room, and, taking her hands in his, exclaimed—

"Ah, my dear child—my dear young lady, that is—I am glad to see you again ; but not glad to see you looking so. Bother it, Mistress Margaret ! they have worried all the colour out of your cheeks. They used to bloom like a couple of roses in a summer's day ; but now they are like lilies in shade. Well, man's a curious beast ! I would not have had a hand in withering those roses, to be Archbishop of Canterbury."

"The stem on which they grew will soon wither also," said Margaret, sadly. "The tree is dead at the heart, Doctor, and can never bloom again."

"Don't say that, Mistress Margaret—don't say that, my dear child," cried the good parson. "That's just what I came to

see you about, with the least possible hope that, one way or another—what between representations and denunciations — oh, that I were but a Roman Catholic, and believed in transubstantiation! Wouldn't I curse them from the altar, and put a great seal upon them? But, as I was saying, I do think something might be done. What the foul fiend the conjuring man intends to do, I don't know—but your father seems to me like a rock; and as to Robert Woodhall, he is mischief itself, and the more he thinks he vexes you, the more he'll do it. Couldn't you get up early one moon-light morning, darling, and just make a run of it? There's a young man on the other side of the water, who would be glad enough to hold you to his heart; and I'd go over and marry you, to prevent mischief."

"Hush, hush, hush!" cried Margaret, clasping her hands wildly. "Oh, forbear, forbear, my friend!—No," she continued; "my father has called down the curse of



God upon his head if he does not give me to Robert Woodhall. I have consented, in order to save poor Ralph's life—and I will be honest. I will keep my word, though it kill me."

"Ay, but wasn't that word cheated out of you, my darling?" asked the parson, earnestly. "Did they not persuade you that poor Ralph had killed your brother Harry? If they did, I can show you in this paper here that it was one of the biggest lies that ever was told.—I may show you the paper, dear Mistress Margaret; for, though it was given to me in confidence—*sub sigillo confessionis*, as I should say, if I were a diplomatist (God help the benighted people, and the King at the back of them!)—I was permitted, by the letter, to bring it forward if they tried Ralph for the murder, and to show it to you if need be. Now, I say, I can prove from this—"

"No need, good friend," interrupted Margaret, laying her hand upon his arm.

“There is only one thing you can do for me, and *that* I much wish you to do. I have never been deceived in regard to Ralph’s innocence of my brother’s death. I have always done him justice; but I want you to tell him, Doctor Mac Feely—I want you to tell him hereafter,” (and the tears rolled plentifully down her face,) “that Margaret loved him to the last hour she was permitted to love any one on earth. At the altar, I renounce all earthly love. The ceremony might as well be my funeral as my marriage; for it consigns my heart to the tomb, and leaves my spirit only to seek its Maker.—Thank God! I have wept again. I believe these tears will save my reason.”

The good clergyman wept too—wept like a child; but, in the midst of his tears, he kept feeling in his pocket, till he brought forth an unsealed letter, from the midst of which he took out another paper.

“But what answer do you give to this man?” he asked, totally forgetting that poor

Margaret knew not who the man was. "He's a strange creature, and deals with the devil, I've little doubt. I spent a couple of hours with him one day, and he told me all manner of things—a learned man, too. I was his match in Latin; but he beat me to mud in Greek; and as to Hebrew and Arabic, Lord ha' mercy upon us!"

"Who who?" cried Margaret. "Do you mean Moraber?"

"Oh ay, just Moraber," answered the parson. "Moraber's his surname, and Devil, I suppose, is his Christian name, though not a very Christian name either. But see what he writes to you here; for I take it for granted it's intended for you, because he told me to give it you." And he spread out the inner paper before Margaret's eyes.

"Misguided girl!" the paper ran. "You have nearly destroyed your own happiness for ever, for want of trust and confidence. Did I not tell you to be true and faithful to the last, and your happiness would be

secure? Write me down an answer to these questions:—

“Do you still love him whom you loved first?

“Has your heart never swerved from him through vanity, lightness, or caprice?

“Was it solely to save his life that you consented to wed a man whom, if there be any honesty in the heart of woman, you are bound to hate? Answer at once, and answer truly.”

“Here’s a pen and ink, darling,” said Doctor Mac Feely, bringing the implements for writing from a distant table. “I’ll take it upon me that you can answer all the questions handsomely enough; and the man says something about a hope in his letter to me, though how the devil he found me out, or his little spalpeen of a boy in blue and silver, either, I can’t tell. He can’t have an optic glass that will look all the way from Lincolnshire to Cerne Abbas, to say nothing of the corners it would have to peep round.”

“I will answer truly at all events,” observed Margaret, “be there hope or no hope.” Taking the pen, she wrote rapidly—“I love him ever. No feeling of my heart has ever swerved from him. It was solely to save his life that I consented to wed a man whom I hate. This is all true, so help me Heaven at my utmost need !”

“There, Doctor Mac Feely,” she said, “give him that. But it is all in vain. You know the marriage is appointed for Friday next.”

“Friday !” echoed the Doctor. “That’s an unlucky day, my dear. I never knew any one married on Friday in all my life.”

“There never was such a bridal as mine,” said Margaret. “Unlucky ! Oh, Doctor Mac Feely, if they chose the most unlucky day in all the calendar, they could hardly find one black enough to fit my wedding. I will not be married in mourning,” she added, “for it would grieve my father ; but I will

have no bridal finery : I will not affect to rejoice while my heart is dying."

"Well, I think it would have been but civil," returned the Doctor, "to let *me* know about this Friday."

"Doubtless you will hear of it to-day," rejoined Margaret. "Originally, the day was fixed for the Monday after ; but something seems to have affected Lady Coldenham strangely, and she has urged my father to curtail even the short space allowed. To me it is indifferent, what is the day of execution. I doubt not Jane Grey shrank from the block and axe, as I shrink from the altar and the ring ; but she met her fate firmly, and so will I.—Hark ! there is a halloo in the field ! They must be coming back. Take the paper ; but say that I have no hope—that my fate is sealed. Remember to tell Ralph what I have said, and bid him think of me as of one dead ; for to everything that makes existence life, I must be dead from the moment the ring is on my finger."

After a few words more, Doctor Mac Feely left her, and in less than a quarter of an hour, the house, so lately silent and solitary, was full of gay sounds and heedless laughter, jarring painfully with the thoughts of the melancholy tenant of that solitary room. Indeed, it seemed as if the whole party, with the exception of Lord Woodhall, had determined to leave the poor girl to her own imaginations. No one came to console or support her. No one even attempted to cheer her by conversation, or to withdraw her from her sad and lonely state. Her father, however, visited her, and strove to speak cheerfully; but there was a silent reproach in his daughter's deep gloom, which sent him ever away with a heart depressed, and a consciousness that he had destroyed the peace of his only remaining child.

## CHAPTER XVI.

HORSES and carriages were at the door of Ormebar Castle. The court-yard was crowded with servants in every kind of livery. Lady Coldenham had resolved that the marriage should not want witnesses, and every one of noble blood in the county had been invited. One or two, who had been there the preceding week, asked, as they arrived, whether Lord Coldenham had returned; and, though the answer was, 'No,' they did not much marvel; for Lady Coldenham was so completely monarch in her own family, that no one could expect she would make any alteration in her ar-



rangements for the pleasure or convenience of a son.

The great hall was thrown open on that inauspicious morning, richly decorated with evergreens and the few flowers which still lingered after the year's brighter part had passed away. Not less than forty or fifty people were assembled in that hall ; but none of the family yet appeared amongst them, with the exception of Robert Woodhall, who had entered the room, remained for a few minutes, and retired again, explaining that some deeds and other writings had to be signed in the small room hard by, where Lady Coldenham usually received her guests.

To that room we must turn our eyes, before we relate what occurred afterwards in the hall when the party was setting out for the wedding.

It was a handsome and beautifully decorated chamber, nearly square, with a highly-ornamented ceiling of black oak. It was called in those days the little with-

drawing-room ; but was at least thirty feet in length, and seven or eight-and-twenty in width. A large table was placed in the middle of the apartment, and at it was seated old Lady Coldenham, in a capacious arm-chair. She was richly attired, and looked, in her stern dignity, like a queen upon her throne. She had become awfully pale, however, during the last few weeks ; the blending of colour in her cheeks was gone, and the flesh looked not like marble, but wax.

Old Lord Woodhall was seated near, with a nervous, anxious, apprehensive expression of countenance. Two or three lawyers, with a number of parchments before them, were farther down the table. Robert Woodhall, and some of his gay friends, rather older than himself—loose, debauched men, with that weak, supercilious expression of countenance which almost always gathers upon the face after a life of promiscuous licentiousness—stood at a little distance from the table, on Lord Woodhall's

right ; while Margaret appeared behind, near a window, leaning heavily on the arm of Hortensia Danvers—the only bridesmaid she had chosen, and whom she had persisted in choosing, notwithstanding a cold sneer from Lady Coldenham, and some opposition on the part of the poor girl's father.

Hortensia was in a blaze of beauty, and magnificently attired. Her bright eyes were flashing with light, her brow slightly contracted, her beautifully-chiselled nostrils expanding like those of a proud horse, and her fine arching lip quivering with feelings of indignation that hardly could be repressed. Her arm was passed across Margaret's waist, as she leaned upon her, with a fond and comforting pressure ; but her eyes were turned forward towards Lord Woodhall and Lady Coldenham, and seemed to express wonder as well as disgust. Behind her and Margaret stood their two maids ; and the faithful old at-

tendant of the unhappy bride, often put her handkerchief to her eyes, which bore marks of many tears.

Some conversation took place between the persons seated at the table, regarding the contents of the documents before them. There were some points which Lord Woodhall seemed not to comprehend easily, and which the lawyers did not explain clearly.

At length, however, after several minutes had passed in question and answer, the old Lord seemed to grow impatient. "Well, give me the pen," he cried. "It does not much matter. I dare say it is all right." And, in a bold, dashing manner which hardly covered the trembling of his hand, he wrote the word "Woodhall."

"Now, my lady," said one of the lawyers, addressing Lady Coldenham, "you will have the goodness to sign this paper, and your son below."

A slight shade of hesitation seemed to pass across Lady Coldenham's face; and, though she took the pen and dipped it in

the ink, she held it suspended a moment before she wrote her name. The noise, perhaps, of the opening door, which was a little behind her on the left, hurried the act, and the paper was signed.

Robert Woodhall had already advanced to write his name after his mother's, and received the pen from Lady Coldenham's hand. But at that moment Lord Coldenham himself came forward, and put his brother aside, saying,

“Stop a moment, sir.”

His tone was so stern and decided, that Robert drew back, and Lady Coldenham fixed her eyes upon her eldest son with an expression of fierce, but apprehensive, enquiry, as one may see a chained eagle, when menaced by a child's cane, gaze at him, ready to strike, yet watchful for the threatened blow.

“Nonsense, Coldenham! No trash just now!” cried Robert Woodhall, with an affected laugh.

“Trash, sir!” echoed Lord Coldenham,

in a stern and bitter tone which he had never in his life assumed before. "Do you suppose that I would jest at a moment like this?—I ask you, madam," he continued, turning to his mother, "if this is to go on. There stands a poor girl, driven, by hard usage, to marry a man whom she detests. This marriage has been hurried rapidly forward, for fear of the appearance of certain unpleasant impediments. Though I wrote from a distant part of the country, it would seem, either that you did not understand how much I knew—or that it was believed I could not get here in time—or that I was supposed to be so base and mean as to conceal facts detrimental to myself which could be beneficial to others. I am here, madam. Those who have so judged me are mistaken. I ask you again—is this to go on?"

"Yes!" ejaculated Lady Coldenham, between her closed teeth, grasping tightly the arm of the chair. "Yes, serpent!"

"It *shall* go on, so help me Heaven!"

cried Lord Woodhall. "I have pledged my honour and my word, and no power on earth can shake me. She shall be his, if I exist three hours longer. I will not live perjured and forsworn."

"Yes, generous brother," said Robert Woodhall. "It *shall* go on ; that I will maintain with my voice and with my sword."

"Your sword!" echoed Lord Coldenham, with a bitter sneer. "Those who rest upon that had better ask Sedgemoor of its glory. —But tell me, sir : what name are you going to sign to that paper?"

"My own, of course," replied Robert, with an expression of surprise.

"And what *is* your own?" asked his brother.

"Forbear, forbear!" shrieked Lady Coldenham.

"Forbear ! Have *you* forborne ?" demanded her son. Then, turning to Margaret, he took her hand kindly, saying, "Margaret, my dear cousin, I ask

*you*—Shall this go on? I tell you, you are in no degree bound to that young man; that he is not what he seems; that he stands before you there, a lie.—Speak one word, and I will end it all. I tell you, you are not bound to him.”

“I am bound by my promise to my father,” replied Margaret, in a low, still, solemn voice.

Lord Woodhall’s face had been becoming redder and more red; and, as his daughter answered, he exclaimed, “And I say she *shall* marry him, be he who or what he may!”

And he added a fearful oath.

“Well, then, without there!” cried Lord Coldenham, raising his voice high; and the door was immediately partly opened.

“You cannot go in there, sir,” said the voice of a servant, in quick accents. “We are ordered to keep back every one but the family.”

“Out of my way, knaves!” vociferated a loud, rich, powerful voice, which echoed round



and round the room. "Learn that *I* am master here!" At the same moment, the door flew wide open, and two of Lady Coldenham's servants were cast headlong into the room.

Following them, with a firm, calm step, and a brow stern and gloomy, came a man of about sixty years of age, of ordinary height, powerful in frame, and dignified in carriage. He was richly, though somewhat darkly, attired; and in his hand he carried a large roll of paper.

All eyes turned in that direction, and Lady Coldenham's with the rest. She uttered no word, no scream; but a low groan escaped her, and her eyes closed.

A multitude of questions were asked, and sudden exclamations uttered.

"Why, that is the old man we saw in Lincolnshire," cried Robert Woodhall.

"God bless my life! I recollect you quite well, Sir Robert," said one of the old lawyers sitting at the table.

“ Who are you, sir ?” demanded old Lord Woodhall, almost fiercely.

“ That woman’s husband,” replied Moraber, pointing to Lady Coldenham ; “ otherwise, Sir Robert Hardwicke of Ormebar Castle.—Take her away ; she has fainted, as well she may, at the sight of one who has forborne too long.”

“ But you were supposed dead,” said the lawyer, who had before spoken ; “ she married under a false impression. She thought you had been killed by the Moors on the coast of Africa.”

“ She knew that I was a slave of the Moors,” replied Sir Robert Hardwicke, “ and she amused me with hopes of ransom, for three long years after she had married Lord Coldenham, as these loving letters will testify. Then indeed she thought me dead ; for I discovered the fraud, and suffered the tale of my death in captivity to go forth.”

“ Then I am Lord Coldenham,” exclaimed

Robert, with a disgusting laugh of exultation; "for I was born more than four years after my mother's marriage."

"Not so," replied Sir Robert Hardwicke, seating himself in the chair from which Lady Coldenham had just been removed. "Your mother's marriage was a fraud, and as such invalid altogether."

"We will have proof of that," said Robert Woodhall.

"Were these letters not proof," answered the other, gravely, "the fact of her having a monument erected to a man whom she knew to be living, and having buried therein a wooden figure, pretending it to be a corpse brought from beyond sea, would, methinks, be sufficient. I tell you, sir, and I tell all, that you are simply Robert Ratcliffe, the natural son of Catherine Ratcliffe, Lady Hardwicke, by the Earl of Coldenham. Now let us see whether Lord Woodhall will marry his only child to you or not."

"He promised her to me without reser-

ration," cried Robert, vehemently. "He did it for services I performed to him, unconnected with my birth. He took God to witness—he pledged his honour and his faith—"

"And I will keep them sacredly," interposed Lord Woodhall, after an instant's hesitation. "Margaret, there stands your husband: let us end this scene. The clergyman is waiting. The guests are all prepared. Shuffle those parchments to the dogs! My heiress can build up a new family. It was not his fault if his mother played the fool!"

Margaret pressed her hand upon her brow; for a momentary hope had risen in her breast, only to be extinguished. Lord Woodhall, however, grasped her arm, saying—

"Come on."

"Leave her with me, my Lord," said Hortensia, sadly. "You, go on with the bridegroom. We will follow."

"Come on then, Robert," rejoined the old

Lord, taking the young man's arm. "Sir Robert Hardwicke, we leave you and your wife's eldest son to finish as you please the fine scene you have arranged to-day. This one, at least, I will take care of."

"So be it," said Moraber ; " but, methinks, in courtesy, I must grace the wedding, seeing it is so joyful a one. Lead on, my Lord; and, if the bride come living from the altar, we will still feast the gay company here, in this place, where one happy marriage was celebrated some thirty years ago. Lead on, my Lord, I say."

"I will so," returned Lord Woodhall, sharply. "Come, Margaret, follow me closely."

Thus saying, he walked on with Robert Woodhall, throwing wide the door which led into the great hall beyond.

Margaret followed with a faint step, and a hand which Hortensia felt trembling on her arm.

Lady Danvers whispered to her eagerly, and her last words were—

“At the altar ! At the very altar ! He has no claim—your promise is not to him. You promised to wed Robert Woodhall ; not this man.”

But still Margaret moved on.

The gay company in the hall separated, making a sort of lane as the bridal party passed, and several voices exclaimed,

“Health and happiness to the bride and bridegroom !”

But the cheek of Robert Woodhall, which had been flushed with excitement, turned deadly pale a moment or two after he had entered the hall. What was it produced the change ? And why did his eyes stare so fixedly forward ? There was nothing in the way to the hall-door, but an old man and a young one. But that young one was taking a step forward, and the old one tried to hold him back in vain.

“Robert Ratcliffe, you are a knave, a liar, a villain, a cheat, a traitor !” vociferated Gaunt.

Stilling, approaching close to him and striking him a blow.

The ladies scattered back in terror, and Robert, after an instant's hesitation, laid his hand upon his sword, and drew it. The moment it was out, Gaunt Stilling's sword was crossed with his blade.

Lord Woodhall and Robert's brother beat up the weapons ere two passes had been exchanged; but, as they did so, Robert Woodhall fell back upon the pavement, and then Gaunt Stilling thrust his sword into the sheath, and dropped his hands by his side, for any one to take him who would.

The confusion that succeeded was indescribable. Some rushed round the fallen man and raised him up, gazing on his face, or striving to staunch the bleeding of a small wound on the right side, which would have seemed of no great importance, had not the torrent of gore which poured from it, told how deep the avenging blade had

gone. Those who gazed upon his face, soon saw that the attempt to keep in the flood of life was vain. The unhappy young man's eyes rolled in his head ; but they were meaningless, lifeless. Their motion was merely convulsive, as probably were also the gasping efforts he made as if to speak.

Others rushed upon the slayer and seized him roughly, while his father approached slowly, and exclaimed,

“ Oh, my son ! What have you done ? ”

To the latter he answered, sternly,

“ Avenged my sister, old man—avenged her whom he deceived, and wronged, and killed by falsehood. The serpent, whom your weak compliance with his mother's fraud, warmed into venomous power, stung your own child to the death, and your other child has crushed him.”

Then, turning sharply upon those who had laid hands upon him, he shook them off, saying—



“What need to seize a man who seeks not to escape ; who is neither ashamed of the deed he has done or afraid of its consequences ? Stand back, and let me look upon the villain !”

And, striding forward, he gazed upon the face of Robert Woodhall, while the dead man’s brother supported the flaccid form partly on his knee, and Sir Robert Hardwicke held his hand upon the pulse.

“Ay, young libertine,” ejaculated Gaunt Stilling, looking sternly in his face, “I warned thee, but thou would’st not be warned : thou had’st timely notice to forbear—thou had’st timely notice to keep thy word to my poor Kate. But thou must wed a great lady, must thou ? Thou must have the broad lands of Woodhall ? Thou must leave Kate Stilling to die of grief and shame, after having poisoned her mind against father and brother. But I warned thee—I warned thee, long ago ; and thou did’st contrive, too, to make me take the life of thy noble cousin, believing that one

who bore the name of Woodhall was bold enough to fight his rival manfully, and not to put it upon another. That is the only thing I regret in life. You stare," he continued, sharply turning to one of the guests. "Do you suppose that, standing here, and seeing him lie there a piece of carrion, with his soul fresh blown to another world, whither I must soon follow to stand before the same judgment-seat—that I feel the least regret, remorse, or shame, for having sent him thither?—No, man, no! I am proud of the deed. Society is my debtor. God has taken vengeance by my hand, and only timely did it come.—Look at that lady, there—" and he pointed to Margaret, who stood trembling like an aspen leaf hard by—"trapped to his snares by the most deceitful artifices—loathing him, yet bound to him by lie-obtained promises—on the point of sacrificing happiness, and life itself, rather than break her plighted word. Look at that old man—" and he pointed to Lord Woodhall—"whose heart would

have been one everlasting curse—a core of fire in his bosom—if he had been suffered to drag his daughter to the altar, to unite her fate to that reprobate. These have I saved by that one blow : but not only these ; all you around owe me much. From such a pitiful villain as this—from such a dark and secret plotter, who did his blackest deeds by other men’s hands—no heart is safe, no home is sacred. Hark you, Robert Ratcliffe ! I come after you very speedily. Prepare to meet me before the throne of the Great Judge. The God who judges the heart, and knows whether mine has been upright and honest, even in this last deed—to Him I appeal my cause. Let Him judge between thee and me !”

He spoke so vehemently, with such a rapid flow of words, and such sternness of aspect, that no one even dreamed of interrupting him. All seemed horror-stricken—paralysed as it were—by the terrible event which had just taken place, and the strong passion of the young man’s demeanour.

At length, however, Sir Robert Hardwicke spoke, letting drop Robert Ratcliffe's hand lifeless from his own. "Thou speakest to the dead, unhappy young man," he observed. "For many years thou did'st my bidding well in everything. Alas! why did'st thou not obey unto the end?—But it was thy fate. In vain I sent thee to a foreign land: the doom was to be fulfilled."

"It *was* my fate," answered Gaunt Stilling, "and I thank God for it.—Now take me hence: put me where you will. I know what I have to undergo, and I will meet it like a man. This heart may throb as if it would burst; but it shall never quail."

They laid hands upon him gently, and led him away unresisting. The corpse of Robert Ratcliffe was lifted up by the servants, and removed quietly to another chamber. The guests gazed strangely upon each other, and those the least familiar with the family began to drop away one by one, begging to be excused to Lady Coldenham.

These words of ceremony had been repeated once or twice to her eldest son, who had merely bowed coldly, till one flippant woman added, with an enquiring air, "Though we have not had the honour of seeing her Ladyship."

"There is no such person as Lady Coldenham," returned the young man, impatiently; and the news was whispered round, that Lady Coldenham was dead, but that this strange family had been going to celebrate the marriage even while she lay a corpse in the house.

More truth was in the rumour than rumours usually possess; for Lady Coldenham never woke completely from the terrible fit of fainting into which she had fallen. She once made an effort as if to get up from the bed whereon they had laid her, and one of the servants raised her suddenly; but she instantly fell back, and expired without a word. This had already taken place when her son spoke; but he knew it not; and, turning his eyes

from the departing guests, he looked round for one who had greatly moved his interest that day.

Margaret was seated by this time in a distant corner of the room, with her head leaning on Hortensia's shoulder, and her handkerchief pressed against her eyes. The young man approached her kindly, while another and another of the guests took their departure in silence.

"Be comforted, Margaret," he said ; "be comforted, my dear cousin—for you are still my cousin, Margaret. These are sad and terrible scenes for a young and gentle thing like you ; but you have borne yourself nobly and well ; and I trust a better Lord Coldenham will console and repay you for all you have suffered on his account."

Margaret started, and gazed in his face.

"Ay, Margaret," he continued ; "in the common course of events, Ralph Woodhall will soon be Lord Coldenham, as his father now is. For myself, I am so no longer ; and what will become of me, I know not. My

mother's small property will only be sufficient for herself ; but I have my sword unstained, and my heart unburdened ; and I, too, can carve a way for myself in the world."

"Young man," said a voice close to him, while a hand was laid upon his arm, "I have not put you to these bitter trials without motive. You are my adopted son, if you will be so, and heir of all I possess. Your mother I once loved well, till her imperious temper drove me forth to wander over the world. In her ambition, she soon forgot and hated me. I became a captive, a slave, a favorite, a rich merchant, as is often the case in Eastern lands. The liberty which she would not seek for me, I repurchased by my own industry and skill. The estate of Ormebar, good as it is in these lands, is but small to what I possess. If you have lost rank and station, with me you may find affluence and peace ; and, I promise you, after all I have seen of your noble conduct in such trying circumstances,

that you shall ever find the affection of a parent also."

The young man grasped the hand that was held out to him, but bent his head, and something like a tear stained his cheek.

Old Lord Woodhall had remained nearly alone in the middle of the room. Some of the guests had come up and spoken to him ere they departed ; but he seemed hardly to notice or to hear them, remaining with his eyes bent on the ground, and his arms crossed on his chest. Suddenly, something seemed to move him. He strode across the hall with a rapid step, and took Margaret's hands in his.

"Forgive me, my child, forgive me !" he ejaculated. "Henceforth your fate is in your own hands. Your father will never seek to mar it again."



## CHAPTER XVII.

IN the same cell in Dorchester jail, which had first received Ralph Woodhall after his capture, sat Gaunt Stilling, on the evening succeeding the events which I have mentioned. He was heavily ironed ; but he had a lantern, fixed upon the wall at a considerable distance above his head, and, by its light, feeble as it was, he was reading a small book, very closely printed. One passage seemed to interest him much ; for he read it over three or four times. It contained a curious and subtle argument, translated from the Italian, concerning the lawfulness of

certain actions, according to the circumstances in which men are placed ; and it ended with a quotation, in Latin, of the well-known epitaph of Cardinal Brundusinus :—

“ Excessi è vitæ ærumnis facilisque lubensque  
Ne pejora ipsa morte dehinc videam.”

He was interrupted, before he could go farther, by the entrance of the chief turnkey, who took especial care to look along the passages before he entered, and then closed the door securely behind him.

“ Has the parson come ?” asked Stilling, raising his head suddenly.

“ No,” replied the turnkey ; “ not yet, Gaunt. But I want to have a little talk with you ; and I have brought the light irons, for these are too heavy.”

“ I care not for them,” rejoined Stilling. “ What matters it to me whether they are light or heavy ? Do you suppose I am going to try to escape ?”

"No, no, Master Stilling," said the turnkey. "We must have no more escapes."

"Ay," said Gaunt Stilling, "yet I could frighten you into opening that door, and letting me out in five minutes."

The turnkey shook his head.

"What! not if I could prove that you received eighty pound out of the three hundred and fifty?"

"You can't prove that," said the turnkey, with a grin.

"You are mistaken," replied Gaunt Stilling. "Every piece was marked in the presence of a witness, and five of them which you spent are easily to be found. There is not one of you, of all the five who shared the money, that is not just as much in my power as I am in yours. If it depended upon my word, that might be nothing; but remember there are several others in the business, who are now free enough to bear testimony."

"But you are too honourable a man to

peach," said the turnkey, a good deal frightened.

"Honourable!" echoed Gaunt Stilling, with a scoff. "But no matter. I don't want to escape, Master Blackstone. I can as well die one day as another; and I do not know any day this last twelvemonth in which I should not have been quite ready to go. Hanging is not unpleasant, they tell me; and, at all events, it must be a great deal better then lying for weeks in a sick bed, and then going out like the end of a candle."

"I am glad you think so," said the jailer, dryly. "But come, Master Stilling, give me your word of honour that you will not peach on us. You know it was only at your request, and because you were an old friend, that we did what we did."

"You have forgotten the three hundred and fifty golden jacobuses," said Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh. "Well, well! I must have a better room, and that to-night I must have a better light, and that speedily."

I must have a pen, and ink, and paper, to write with. I must have a bottle of wine and a cold chicken, for the parson. It's a long time to the assizes, and I must make myself comfortable."

The turnkey rubbed his head, and thought for a moment; for his predicament was somewhat unpleasant.

"The best I can do for you to-night, Master Stilling," he said, "is to put you in the little room in the third ward. It has got a good planked floor, and a fire-place. You'll be out of my district; but I'll tell you who has got the keys. It is Jones Barstow—you recollect him I dare say—a green hand, mighty fond of strong waters, which, when he gets enough of them, send him sound sleep. The Governor doesn't put many 'capitals' there, for fear Barstow should let them out—he is such a soft one.—But I'll speak with the Governor, and get it done for you."

"Very well," answered Stilling. "Set about it quickly; and remember I shall look

to you, Master Blackstone, for everything I want."

"In reason, in reason," said the turnkey, and went his way.

The Governor made some objections ; for though Barstow, being a distant cousin of his wife, enjoyed his favour, yet he had but little confidence in him, and Stilling had been represented as a resolute, desperate fellow, requiring the strictest watch. The head turnkey overcame his scruples, however, representing that the man had no thought of escape, and adding that he seemed to think hanging rather pleasant than otherwise.

"Wait till he tries it," said the Governor, laughing. "However, if you are sure of him, put him there. I don't mind."

In about half an hour, Gaunt Loring was in a more comfortable room ; and in a few minutes after, Doctor Mac Feely was admitted to him.

"Ah, young man, young man !" ejaculated the good Doctor, "this is a sad pass you've

brought yourself to. You go on your own way all your life, and then you send for the parson."

"Sit down Doctor," said Gaunt Stilling, with a look so much gayer than any which Doctor Mac Feely had seen upon his countenance when last they met, that the worthy clergyman was both surprised and afflicted ; nor was his mind much relieved when Gaunt Stilling went on to say, "I didn't send for you, Doctor, for the purposes you imagine. I dare say you think that I am sorry for what I have done ; but there you are mistaken : or that I'm afraid of being hanged ; but there you're mistaken again."

"You'll be hanged as sure as a gun, and no help for it, my dear boy," said Doctor Mac Feely. "I'll bet you a bottle of it ; and let the longest liver drink it."

"I know I shall be hanged," answered Gaunt Stilling ; "but the reason why I sent for you was, that you might take down the whole particulars of everything that has happened,

exactly as it did happen. I have determined to save judge, and jury, and lawyers, all sorts of trouble, and I shan't give the hangman much either. You've got that paper I sent you. You behaved like an honest man about that ; though I believe the law would have had you give it up."

"Well, well, perhaps it might," said the Doctor ; "but the paper didn't tell much, young man. It only said you killed poor Harry Woodhall in mistake, and that Master Ralph was never back in Norwich that night ; but not a word did you say about how it happened."

"Well, I'll tell you all now," replied Gaunt Stilling ; "so take that paper, and write down my confession ; then I will sign it, and you shall witness it."

Doctor Mac Feely seated himself at the table, dipped the pen in the ink, and dated the paper, saying, quietly, "Don't make it too long, lad ; about the length of a sermon will do."

"You shall have a bottle of wine and a



chicken when you've done," said Gaunt Stilling.

"The wine I don't mind," answered the Doctor; "but as for the chicken, I've no stomach. The sight of all these passages and locks and bolts, and you here in the middle of them, has taken away my appetite; so fire away, my boy, and make haste."

"Young Robert Ratcliffe," said Gaunt Stilling, leaning his head upon his hand, "who always passed for the lawful son of Lord Coldenham—"

"There's another pretty affair!" interrupted Doctor Mac Feely. "Who would ever have thought that that proud old woman was a—whew!"

"Never mind her," returned Gaunt Stilling, "bad the crow, bad the egg. Put that down. Young Robert Ratcliffe, who passed for Lord Coldenham's lawful son, was an insolent, profligate fellow. He had done much mischief in the village, and when I returned from Tangier, I found him often

coming to our house, and seeing my sister Catherine. Poor unhappy girl! I came too late!—I warned him off—told him I would not have him there, and gave him fair notice that I would beat him if he came, and terribly punish him if he wronged my sister.

“My father had been foolish enough to think he would marry her, because she was handsome and well taught; and he had a hold upon the old woman by knowing her secrets. The young man one day, too, said that he *would* marry her; and that was the poor girl’s ruin. I knew better than to believe such nonsense, and opened my father’s eyes at length, so that he was as eager to move her out of the way of temptation as I was, and we agreed to bring her here to our relations in Dorset. My uncle met her half way, and she was kept secure enough from that time.

“But her shame soon become apparent; and when I went over from Norwich to see her there was no longer any concealment.

I had promised revenge, and I resolved to take it. But it was needful to wait my time, when, as if good fortune would have it, chance seemed to throw the opportunity in my way. I heard that there had been a quarrel between young Ralph Woodhall, with whom I was, and Robert Ratcliffe, in the ball-room of the Duke of Norfolk's house. I heard that Ralph had dragged him away, by the neck, from Mistress Margaret, when she fainted, and that the villian quitted the room, and sent for his cousin Henry.

"I did not suspect, at that time, that he was altogether a coward, and naturally thought that a duel would follow. That did not please me, for I wanted to punish him myself; and I would have given a great deal to take Ralph's place. Besides, though Ralph is a good swordsman, Robert had been fencing all his life, and was full of tricks. As I expected, Robert Ratcliffe's servant Roger came twice, seeking Ralph Woodhall. The last time, he brought a sealed letter. I asked him if it was a challenge, and he

said it was ; so I naturally thought that it came from the man with whom Ralph had quarrelled.

“ My master was then absent, gone with Lady Danvers to Thetford ; but he was to be back long before night, and I managed to find out, one way or another, that the duel was to take place by moonlight and without seconds. I ascertained the place, too, and a quick thought passed through my mind that, if Ralph did not return, I would take the opportunity myself. I answered, therefore, boldly, that he would be at the place appointed ; adding, below my breath, ‘ or somebody else in his stead.’ ”

“ When the knave was gone, I had a strong inclination to look into the letter ; but I had heard my master speak so highly about the shame of opening letters to other people, that I could not bring my mind to do it. I was uneasy, however, for fear he should come back in time ; and I rode after him part of the way towards Thet-

ford. He told me he should certainly be back before night ; but they had made such little progress that so speedy a return was not likely ; and I found out from the Duke of Norfolk's servants that they did not intend to let him come back ; for that the Duke had sent him out of the way, to prevent his receiving the challenge. I kept it snug in my pocket, therefore ; and returned to Norwich, where I remained in a great fright lest he should come.

“ Night fell, however, and at ten o'clock I was on the ground. Nobody was there ; and, sitting down upon a bench, I dropped into a doze, out of which a quick step at length awoke me. It was very foggy, and, though the moon gave some light, one could not see a man's face clearly. The man was of the same height, too, as Robert Ratcliffe, dressed much in the same way, and I was hardly awake. His sword was in his hand when first I saw him, and he said, ‘ Come, no words, sir. Draw your sword ! On my life, you take it coolly.’

“ There was something in the voice which startled me, though I knew neither of their tongues well ; but, as his sword was out, mine was soon out too. We made two or three passes, and he pressed me hard ; for I had a doubt, and wanted to be sure. He beat me out from beneath the trees to a place by the side of the basin, where there was more light ; and then he seemed surprised, and lost his guard just as I was lunging quart over the arm. I had no notion I should hit him ; but he did not parry, and the blade went through his body. He was killed in fair fight, however ; and, though it was a mistake, it was no murder. The knave Roger, Robert Ratcliffe’s servant, can tell you more as to how his cowardly master got Henry Woodhall to take the burden off his own shoulders.”

Doctor Mac Feely shook his head. “ ‘ Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed,’ ” he observed. “ If

this isn't murder, Gaunt Stilling, I should like to know what the devil it is."

"Be that as it may," returned Gaunt Stilling, "I was only the more resolved to have vengeance upon that villain, Robert. I went to seek him at Sedgemoor, when I heard he was there; but I was stopped and prevented; and I heard afterwards that he had slunk away from the battle.

"After that, I found that poor Master Ralph was in prison, and my heart was torn many ways; for my sister sent for me, and I found her dying. The villain had broken her heart by a letter he wrote her, mocking her claims, and making a scoff of her love. She never took heart again, and died a fortnight after the birth of her child. I was resolved, however, that Ralph should not suffer by my deed, if I could help it; and I wrote that paper and brought it to you.

"I kept myself out of the way, indeed, because I always thought the time for my vengeance would come; and when I heard,

in Holland, that Robert Ratcliffe was going to marry Margaret Woodhall, to gain all his ends and objects, and perhaps in time to become Lord Woodhall, I made up my mind what I would do. I sought out Sir Robert Hardwicke, who went so long by the name of Moraber—”

“What could make him take such a heathenish name?” interrupted Doctor Mac Feely. “There’s not a Christian letter in it.”

“It is but Ormebar, turned another way,” replied Gaunt Stilling. “But write on, write on. I did not tell Sir Robert all I intended, though he has ever been kind and generous to me. But he seemed to divine a great deal, and cautioned me to beware. He told me that he intended to claim his own—to bring the adultress to shame, and to dispossess the sons of Lord Coldenham, giving Ralph their place, because he had loved his mother when she was young. He said



that would be punishment enough ; and I hesitated a little.

“I resolved to make sure, however, for I knew him to be soft-hearted ; and I went with my father yesterday morning to Ormebar Castle, where Sir Robert had appointed him to come to bear witness. When I saw the villain, however, issue out into the hall with Margaret Woodhall, to go to the church, my blood seemed to boil up. I had no longer any command over myself, or any scruple, and—I killed him. Now don’t say a word, good man. There are some offences that the law does not touch ; there are some evils that no law will prevent : I have punished the one, and have stopped the other. That is my only offence, and I am ready to die for it.”

“If I put those last words down, they’ll twist a cord round your throat to a certainty, Gaunt,” remarked Doctor Mac Feely. “Lawyers won’t have it that there is anything law can’t do ; and they always hang a man who preaches the contrary.”

“Put them down—put them down,” said Gaunt Stilling; “they will make no difference in my fate.—Now, give me the paper, and I will sign it. You put your name there.”

“We had better have in another witness,” suggested Doctor Mac Feely; and, calling to the turnkey, he made Gaunt Stilling read over the whole paper in the man’s presence, and acknowledge its accuracy before he signed his name.

The chicken and the bottle of wine were then brought in; but good Doctor Mac Feely was in no mood for either eating or drinking; and, after taking one glass to please the prisoner, he retired, promising to visit him again in a couple of days.

Some weeks passed, without anything remarkable occurring in Dorchester jail, till an early fall of snow took place, on the morning after which the room of Gaunt Stilling was found vacant. A plank had been taken up in the floor, and extended from the high window (the bars of which

had been wrenched out) to the parapet of the door-keeper's lodge. Thence, for any one to make his escape, a wall some six feet high was to be surmounted, and then a leap of fourteen or fifteen feet into the lane, had to be taken.

That this had been accomplished, was proved by the marks in the snow ; and foot-prints, undoubtedly those of Gaunt Stilling, were traced some way on the Weymouth road, till the traffic effaced them. He was never actually heard of more ; but, in the fourth year of the reign of King William the Third, some portions of a skeleton, and a complete set of irons covered with rust, were taken out of a deep hole in the river Wey.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Two brief scenes more, and I have done. The outline of the one, probably the imagination of the reader could fill up ; but the other requires to be pictured more completely.

Let me premise, however, that all applications to King James for assurance that Ralph Woodhall should not be prosecuted for the events which had taken place at Thetford, were vain : the King, rampant with his success over Monmouth, only demonstrated a determination, which became stronger and stronger, to per-

secute all who showed any favour towards dissenters. In vain Lord Woodhall petitioned. In vain the young man's father, now Lord Coldenham, urged that his son was a steadfast member of the Church, and had only acted from motives of pure humanity. They knew too well what would be the consequence of Ralph's return to England; and both of them at length went over to pass a few months with him in Holland.

When, at length, William of Orange landed on the shores of Great Britain, and marched towards London, one of the most favoured officers of his army was the Honorable Colonel Woodhall; and when the Crown was placed by the voice of the people upon William's head, and James himself became an exile, a beautiful and blooming bride sailed gaily over with Queen Mary from Holland, and joined her husband at Coldenham Castle. She was beautiful and blooming

again ; but a certain delicacy of complexion—a want of that high and almost rustic health, which Margaret Woodhall had once enjoyed—gave her husband some uneasiness, especially as her strength did not seem to increase even in the air of her native land and county. She was very joyous, however, and very happy. And three beautiful babes came as blessings to the household.

But no happiness can endure long unalloyed. Within the four years that followed Ralph's marriage, his father and Lord Woodhall both sank quietly into the grave ; and Margaret mourned much for her father. Her colour became less vivid, except at night, and she often visited the old monuments in Coldenham Church, and gazed at several vacant places where there was space for a tomb or two more. When people enquired after her health, however, she always said she was very well ; and her husband's eye never but once found a sad

look upon her face, except when she was mourning for her father. She was, at the moment, gazing at her children ; and when Ralph bent down his head and kissed her cheek, she put her arms round his neck, and whispered a word or two in his ear.

“There is one whom I should greatly prefer,” she said, “if that should happen. You know whom I mean.”

“Hush, hush, dear Margaret!” rejoined Ralph ; “you grow gloomy here. We must change this scene ; and, in the softer air and brighter landscape of Devonshire, find health and spirits for you.”

Margaret smiled, and said that was not needful ; she only spoke of what might be.

But Ralph carried out his plan ; and, before a week was over, the whole family were moving gently towards Devonshire.

Suppose two more years past, reader, and you see, once more, Lord Coldenham,

not yet quite nine-and-twenty years of age.

A lady—a very beautiful lady—is seated in a chair where Margaret used to sit. She is in a travelling dress; and one young child, of about eighteen months old, is pressed close to her bosom, and playing with its little fingers amongst her rich brown hair. Three others, somewhat older, are clustering round her, and all their young, forgetful faces are raised gladly towards her; but tears are falling rapidly from her eyes, and even her husband turns away towards the window, to conceal a drop that has gathered in his own. The next moment he returned, and clasped her hand in his without uttering a word; and the lady pointed to the children, saying,

“These dear ones do not remember, Ralph—and, indeed, how should they? But neither you nor I, my dear, can ever forget that there has been a Margaret. I will do



all I can to supply her place; but that can never be done completely."

"God bless you, my Hortensia!" ejaculated Ralph, in a voice faltering with emotion, and hurried away from the room.

THE END.

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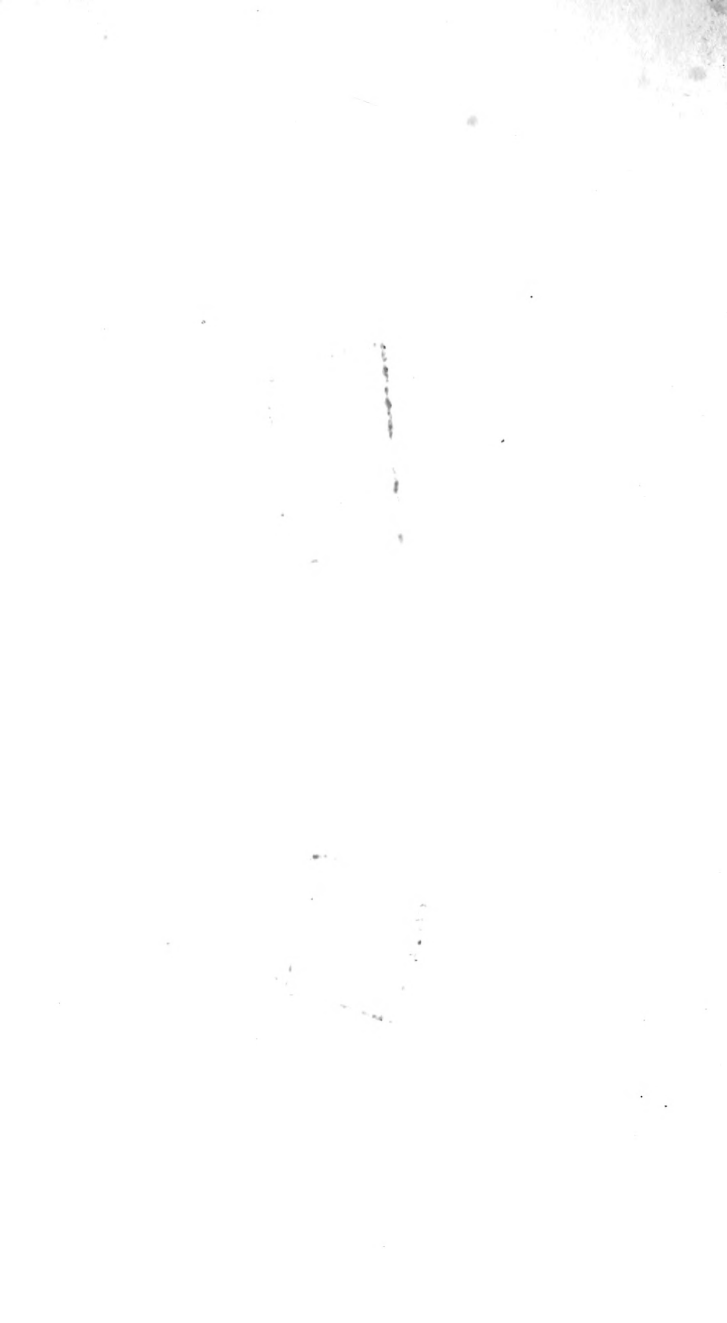
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